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Tip of the Iceberg in Changing School Culture: Acknowledging and Addressing Microaggressions

Nicole Lauren Becker

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TIP OF THE ICEBERG IN CHANGING SCHOOL CULTURE:
ACKNOWLEDGING AND ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSIONS

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents and my two sons, Noah and Cal. Their absolute outpouring of love and support throughout this journey was so encouraging and needed. To Mom and Dad, thank you for always showing up. You set an incredible example of how to set high goals in life and then fight hard to achieve them. To Noah and Cal, thank you for your constant smiles, laughs, and love! Thank you for stepping up and helping with everything while I worked on achieving this. Mom, Dad, Noah, and Cal; this is our achievement as I could not have done this without you! Thank you and I love you more than you will ever know.

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ABSTRACT

Providing a culturally responsive learning environment that allows students and faculty to feel safe and welcomed is essential. This action research study examined the harmful impact of microaggressions in the school and how providing targeted and comprehensive professional development sessions helped faculty members be able to acknowledge and address microaggressions. The research study was conducted in a large elementary school in the northeast United States that serves approximately 800 students. The researcher worked with the school administration team to identify microaggressions as a problem of practice. The focus group interviews, and six-week professional development series aided in the participants' journey through the conscious competence model as their understanding of microaggressions and how to acknowledge and address them helped faculty create a more culturally responsive learning community. The research study showed the positive impact of the professional development sessions on faculty being able to acknowledge and address microaggressions. The focus group interviews also identified the following themes: most student-to-student microaggressions were related to sexuality, most faculty-to-faculty microaggressions were related to race, unawareness of harmfulness of microaggressions and need for cultural responsiveness, lack of confidence in school system's willingness to support those targeted by microaggressions, and exhaustion from dealing with microaggressions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
CS EdD	Curriculum Studies Education Doctorate
DiP	Dissertation in Practice
PoP	Problem of Practice
RQ	Research Question
UofSC	University of South Carolina

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I work in a school in the northeast United States. The school district is the largest suburban school district, and borders one of the major cities in our state. Our city has one of the highest poverty levels and highest homicide rates in the United States. The morning news frequently provides updates regarding shootings or stabbings that took place the previous night. I have seen too many students not make it to high school and I have attended far too many funerals for students. On top of the horrendously high crime rate, the Covid-19 pandemic brought increased hardships to the community and increased achievement gaps to schools (Gonzalez & Bonal, 2021; Klosky et al., 2022). Some of these hardships included loss of income, lack of educational exposure, loss of socialization opportunities, and disruption and change of normalcy in what life used to be like. Many community members in the area have not recovered from this despite already being at a place of extreme struggle before the pandemic hit.

The elementary school where I teach is the largest elementary school in the district. Notably, it also has the lowest socioeconomic levels while serving nearly 800 students in grades K-5. This elementary school has an increasingly diverse population of students; yet the teaching faculty is not nearly as diverse. The teaching faculty is predominantly White. While I genuinely believe the

teachers want to do what is best for students, it has become evident that topics such as implicit bias and culturally relevant pedagogy make some teachers uncomfortable or unwilling to dive into any type of productive conversation.

Due to the lack of productive conversations and at times absence of acknowledgement of cultural diversity, microaggressions are often present within the school environment. Microaggressions are “the everyday, minor, and apparently innocuous degradations, and put-downs experienced by members of oppressed, systematically disadvantaged, or marginalized groups” (McTernan, 2018, p. 261). Microaggressions at times can appear harmless, however, accumulation over time can have negative effects (Compton-Lilly, 2020; Williams, 2020b). Experiencing microaggressions in the classroom can cause negative effects such as feeling isolated or invisible, inability to focus, or feelings of self-doubt (Torino et al., 2019).

Microaggressions were present throughout the day in the school and were witnessed in faculty-to-student, faculty-to-faculty, and student-to-student communication at the school. Some microaggressions went unnoticed by the person at whom the comment was targeted; however, it was evident that some pierced the faculty member or student. Faculty members were at times unaware that their comments were hurtful. Sue and Spanierman (2020) pointed out that the perpetrator, person stating the microaggression, is often unaware that their verbal or nonverbal exchange was demeaning or hurtful. Further, previous attempts to foster cultural awareness at the school have been unwelcomed by some faculty members.

The issue of microaggressions is a needed area of focus in this school as the researcher has witnessed the emotional aftermath of some of the students and the negative attitude that then is associated by the student to the teacher. One microaggression may not cause a lot of harm or have a long-term emotional toll, however, the continuous occurrence could have negative and harmful consequences (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). With this in mind, the efforts to bring awareness to microaggressions needed to be clear and immediate.

Diversity is increasing in student population in American schools (Marrun et al., 2019; Steketee, et al., 2021). At times, the problem is schools being unprepared or multiculturally deficient, which should not be challenges that diverse students need to struggle with (Steketee et al., 2021). Microaggressions can create an unnecessary hurdle for students in the classroom. Some students already must fight against a lack of food, clothing and/or opportunity. Microaggressions should not be an added struggle for students, especially when it can be prevented.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice that guided this action research study dealt with the lack of awareness exhibited by faculty members at the school as it related to microaggressions and how they affected students and faculty. Sue et al. (2008) discussed that the experiences of participants in a related study demonstrated both short- and long-term detrimental consequences of microaggressive messages. This problem may have been due to the lack of understanding of what microaggressions are, the impact they can have, how to avoid making

them, and how to address them when encountered. It was highly possible that faculty were unaware of what they did not know. Schenk et al. (2018) discussed the aim and importance of looking at the conscious competence model to help move an organization. This model includes the journey from unconsciously incompetent to consciously incompetent to consciously competent to finally and hopefully unconsciously competent (Keeley, 2021). Diving deeply into microaggressions in the school community could pull some faculty members out of the unconsciously incompetent area and make the school more welcoming and culturally aware. This in turn would benefit students, faculty, families, and the whole community.

The need for a culturally responsive learning community has never been stronger. Bryant et al. (2017) discussed the demographic changes in the United States and the increase in diversity among students in classrooms: “By 2060, predictions suggest that the White population will become a racial plurality with only 43.6% of the total population” (p. 264). Many teacher education programs have added diversity-focused programs and classes into their requirements (Yuan, 2018), however, that training may not have been provided or available when all current teachers were engaged in coursework.

Most teachers in public schools are White, female, and middle class (Yuan, 2018). Despite the increasingly diverse student population, the U. S. teacher demographics have stayed relatively constant (Bryant et al., 2017). The increase in student diversity is not the problem in schools -- the failed response to the increase in student diversity is the problem. Without attention and action to

creating and fostering a culturally responsive learning environment, students may suffer avoidable and negative consequences. Hidden microaggressions that may arise from teacher perceptions of minority students impact student learning in different ways that interfere with work productivity and create stressful learning environments for students (Bryant et al., 2017). With this supporting data, it is imperative that there be an increased focus on measures schools take to create and support a culturally responsive learning community.

Lack of awareness is hindering the school community as it interferes with providing a safe and nurturing learning environment. Microaggressions can hurt students' self-image when experienced in schools (Winter et al., 2017). There is a massive gap in knowledge around acknowledging and addressing microaggressions. If lack of awareness is the problem, bringing light to the topic of microaggressions seems to be an obvious avenue to helping students feel safer in school.

Theoretical Framework

This action research is grounded in two theories that are used to address the problem of practice. The first theory is the conscious competence model (Keeley, 2021). The second theory is Maslow's theory of motivation with a focus on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023).

Conscious Competence Model

The theory of the conscious competence model provided one of the theories for the problem of practice for this research. The conscious competence model is a framework that provides a powerful tool and lens for improving

learning and increasing awareness of the learning process (Keeley, 2021). This model has been used often in the medical and business fields (Lam & Law, 2019; Kersey-Matusiak, 2018) and can be used in the educational world as well.

By diving into the presence and use of microaggressions on campus, the school community can journey through stages of the conscious competence model in hopes of providing a culturally relevant, supportive, and welcoming school community for students and faculty. The conscious competence model is most often attributed to William Howell as the originator (Cannon et al., 2010). This model allows the analysis of the progression through the learning process. According to this model, learning is viewed as a four-stage process where people progress from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence to conscious competence to unconscious competence (Cannon et al., 2010). Keeley (2021) discussed how the conscious competence model is a tool for measuring ability and mental aptitude.

The first stage of the model is unconscious incompetence where people are unaware of what they do not know (Cannon et al., 2010; Keeley, 2021). The second stage is conscious incompetence (Keeley, 2021; Lam & Law, 2019; Kersey-Matusiak, 2018). This is where the person becomes aware of the problem. In this stage, people tend to be uncertain of how to cope with the differences they noticed (Kersey-Matusiak, 2018). Stage three is conscious competence (Keeley, 2021; Lam & Law, 2019; Kersey-Matusiak, 2018). Being in the conscious competence stage means a person may have the needed skill set to fulfill tasks, however, need to focus and pay attention in order to perform

(Keeley, 2021). The fourth stage is unconscious competence (Keeley, 2021; Lam & Law, 2019; Kersey-Matusiak, 2018). This stage allows for individuals to unconsciously perform tasks. In this stage a person has a proficiency in the desired skill or knowledge that comes naturally (Kersey-Matusiak, 2018).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs provided another foundation and reason as to why the problem of practice needed to be addressed. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is described as a five-tiered theory model that deals with motivation and human needs (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023). The five needs are organized in an order of hierarchy. They include physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization need (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023). The lower needs are the most important ones (Maslow, 1943). The individual's psychological health will be better when the basic needs are satisfied (Lester, 2013). The individual may become overwhelmed by the physiological needs if all needs are unsatisfied (Maslow, 1943).

The needs are grouped into three groups; basic needs, which are the physiological and safety needs; psychological needs, which are the belongingness and esteem needs; and lastly self-fulfillment needs, which includes the self-actualization need (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023). With safety being included in the basic needs category it is apparent how important it is. Many teachers inquire as to why professional developments or seminars are scheduled or required. Some teachers do not buy-in to professional development

unless they understand the meaning or necessity behind it. Maslow's theory provided the theoretical framework for the second part of the research questions and the purpose statement. It is imperative that students feel safe in their own learning environment (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). It is unfair for anyone to expect certain levels of student achievement and development if students do not feel safe. Thus, it is important for teachers to learn about anything, such as microaggressions, that may be hindering students from feeling safe, as well as to how to prevent students from feeling unsafe moving forward.

Research Questions

1. In evaluating the impact of microaggressions, what themes emerged as a result of analyzing the types of microaggressions present and the effects of the microaggressions on the targeted person?
2. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on teachers' awareness of microaggressions?
3. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on how teachers respond and/or address microaggressions when being the target or bystander?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research dissertation was to help bring all kindergarten through fifth grade faculty members to a point of recognizing, acknowledging the existence of, addressing, and most significantly, avoiding making microaggressions. This would in turn help create a more culturally sensitive learning community, which is one of the goals the school is working on for their state mandated improvement plan. Some faculty members were in the unconscious incompetent stage about their microaggressions. An example of this was when a teacher responded to a students' question that they do not see color; all students are equal. The teacher was unaware that this was a microaggression and that it was hurtful to the student. The teacher was unaware of what they did not know, known as unconscious incompetence (Cannon et al., 2010). Educating faculty concerning microaggressions and informing faculty about effective teaching practices filled this gap and provided resources to teachers to help avoid situations as such.

Providing targeted professional development could bring faculty that are currently in this stage to the conscious incompetence stage. The intervention of professional development sessions was structured to address the various stages and bring the faculty together through learning into the conscious competence stage. The goal was to eventually work as a faculty to be in the fourth stage of unconscious competence. The results from the professional development could provide an improved feeling of safety for students, which is one of the basic human needs outlined by Maslow (1943). The hope was that once this

professional development was implemented and the positive results happened, the faculty could begin to look at other topics that would build growth and trust. Since research proves that microaggressions are happening and that they are harmful (Williams, 2020a; Young et al., 2020), the obvious next steps in a school should be to take strides to understand more about microaggressions and implement strategies, policies, and trainings to help prevent the continuation of microaggressions.

Overview of Methodology

This study was a mixed methods action research study. Action research is a form of research that is performed by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others involved directly with the teaching and learning process for the purpose of collecting information and data to better improve their school and the ways students learn and achieve (Mertler, 2020). Action research is beneficial to schools in that it allows teachers to use the findings from their research to inform best practices in the very classrooms and schools the data is collected (Mertler, 2020). The goal of action research is to improve practice (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Mixed methods research allows for the collection of data from multiple sources and combines qualitative and quantitative data (Dawadi et al., 2021). Interviews, surveys, and observations with observation field notes were used throughout this research study. There was a post survey at the end of the professional development training to gauge whether the training was successful in helping faculty learn how to acknowledge and address microaggressions.

The participants for this study included the researcher as a participant observer and active participant throughout, a small subgroup of three faculty members who were interviewed about their experiences with microaggressions in general and at the school, and a participant pool that consisted of 21 faculty members who volunteered for professional development training sessions. The initial subgroup members were in the group of 21 participants for professional development. The study took place at the school where the researcher worked and was conducted over a six-week period during the first trimester of the school year.

Positionality

Positionality is the relationship of the practitioner researcher (PR) to the participants and the setting (Herr & Anderson, 2020). The researcher for this action research study acted in the role of a practitioner researcher and was an insider when considering the continuum of positionality. The teaching faculty is over 90% White. The researcher identifies with the over 90% White teaching faculty and with the majority of female teaching faculty. Positionality allows one's relation to others to mold their understanding of the surroundings (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020).

Positionality is fundamental to qualitative research (Holmes, 2020). The researcher understood the need to earn the trust and respect of the participants. Trust is a cornerstone in any learning culture (Zepada, 2019). There was no concern for the dynamic of power over participants as the researcher was in the role of a teacher in the school building. This role was equal to or subordinate to

the colleagues who participated. The researcher has twenty years of experience in working in low socioeconomic elementary schools in both the northeast and midwest United States. In addition to elementary teaching experience, the researcher has administration and college level teaching experience. The bias the researcher carries is that of a White American female who experienced a middle-class lifestyle as a child and who lives a middle-class lifestyle as an adult. The researcher had an understanding that they did not have the same life experiences growing up as most of her students.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because of the discrimination and racial tensions that exist in the United States (Brooks & Babel, 2022). Schools are not exempt from discrimination and racial tensions and some teachers and administrators are ill-equipped to deal with culturally diverse student populations (Recknagel et al., 2022). This action research dissertation in practice brought to light the problem of racial microaggressions that were being stated to or experienced by students and faculty by faculty members in the school. The cause of this problem could be that some faculty members were unaware the statements they were making were a form of microaggression. Providing targeted effective professional development could bring faculty who were currently unaware of their negative contributions to the learning environment into an area of understanding and improvement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined effective professional development as “structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning

outcomes” (p. 2). Professional development is more efficient and successful when sustained over time and allows for teachers from the same school building to collectively participate (Zepada, 2019). The professional development could be structured to address school needs and bring the faculty together through learning into the conscious competence stage. The goal was to eventually work as a faculty to be in the fourth stage of unconscious competence.

The results from the professional development could provide a deeper sense of safety for our students, which is one of the basic human needs outlined by Maslow (1943). The hope was that once this professional development was implemented, the faculty could begin to look at other topics such as implicit bias and have a deeper sense of trust with each other to continue learning how to create a culturally relative community. This would help in creating an environment where students and faculty feel safe and have a deep sense of belonging.

Dissertation Overview

This mixed methods action research study was conducted to acknowledge and address the presence of microaggressions in the school. The microaggressions were being targeted at students and faculty by faculty members who were at times unaware of the harmful impact of their comments. This dissertation in practice outlined in chapters one through three the problem of practice, research questions addressed, theoretical framework behind the research, the historical perspective, significance of the study and methodology behind the research and collection of data. Chapter four outlined the findings of

the research. The closing chapter, Chapter five outlined the interventions, presentation of findings, analysis, recommendations for practice, and implementation plan.

Key Terms

Action research: “an inquiry conducted by educators in their own setting in order to advance their practice and improve their students’ learning” (Efron & Ravid, 2020, p. 2)

Bystander: the individual who witnesses the microaggression (Sue et al., 2019)

Implicit bias: “an unobservable structure in the mind of an individual that drives behavior in an unconscious manner” (De Houwer, 2019, p. 835)

Microaggression: “the everyday, minor, and apparently innocuous degradations, and put-downs experienced by members of oppressed, systematically disadvantaged or marginalized groups” (McTernan, 2018, p. 261)

Perpetrator: the individual who stated or did the microaggression (Sue et al., 2019)

Target: the individual who is the recipient of the microaggression (Sue et al., 2019)

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students in the school have had to deal with poverty and increasing crime rates in their area for most of their short lives. Students in elementary school should not need to worry about if they will have a safe home or food for dinner; however, this is the reality that many children in the researched elementary school face. Most students in the school were too young to care and provide for themselves and need to feel safe in their environment. The need to feel safe extended to their classroom. Unfortunately, many of the same students who battle poverty are the ones who do not feel a sense of belonging or safety in their own classroom. Many students and faculty at the school are the targets of microaggressions. These hurtful comments are barriers to their sense of belonging, safety, and educational success. This is preventable and needed to be addressed.

This chapter covered major themes that address the Problem of Practice. These themes included historical perspective, theoretical framework, examples of microaggressions, impact of microaggressions, factors causing microaggressions, interventions and strategies, and related research. This chapter concluded with a summary of the importance of acknowledging and addressing microaggressions.

Problem of Practice

Students and faculty members at the school were targets of microaggressions on a regular basis. Faculty members stating the hurtful comments were largely unaware that the comments qualified as microaggressions as well as unaware of the harm they were causing. Lack of awareness was hindering the school community as it interfered with providing a safe learning environment. This problem was possibly due in part to the lack of awareness of what microaggressions are, the impact they can have, how to address them, and how to stop making them.

How are microaggressions hindering the furthering of a culturally sensitive and culturally responsive learning community at the school? Microaggressions are “subtle, commonplace, verbal and non-verbal behaviors or environmental factors that communicate derogatory, hostile, and/or negative messages (e.g., put downs, insults, slights) toward a targeted group or person” (Midgette & Mulvey, 2021, p. 2). There is research that defines microaggressions and breaks microaggressions down into different forms or categories (Ogunyemi et al., 2020; Torino et al., 2019). There is research that proves that it affects people negatively (Douds & Hout, 2020; Ogunyemi et al. 2020). Sue et al. (2008) stated that there has been evidence of both short-term and long-term consequences due to microaggressions. Schenk et al. (2018) discussed the aim and importance of looking at the conscious competence model to help move an organization. This model included the transitions from unconsciously incompetent to consciously incompetent to consciously competent to finally and hopefully unconsciously

competent. Studying microaggressions in the school community could help some faculty members realize they were in the unconscious incompetent stage of the model and help increase the desire to learn more in order to make the school more welcoming and culturally responsive. This would present benefits for all students, faculty, families, and the entire outside community.

The rationale of this mixed methods action research dissertation in practice is to bring to light the problem of microaggressions that are being stated to students and faculty by faculty members in the school and take strides in preventing this. The root of this problem was possibly that some faculty members were grossly unaware that the statements they are making are microaggressions. Providing targeted effective professional development could bring faculty who are currently unaware of their negative contributions to the learning environment into an area of understanding and improvement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined effective professional development as learning that changes teacher practice and knowledge as well as improves student learning outcomes. The professional development was structured to address school needs and bring faculty together through learning into the conscious competence stage. The goal was to eventually work as a faculty to progress towards the fourth stage of unconscious competence. The results from the professional development training sessions allowed faculty to use what they learned to aide in providing a deeper feeling of safety for students, which is one of the basic human needs outlined by Maslow (1943) in his theory of motivation.

Research Questions:

1. In evaluating the impact of microaggressions, what themes emerged as a result of analyzing the types of microaggressions present and the effects of the microaggressions on the targeted person?
2. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on teachers' awareness of microaggressions?
3. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on how teachers respond and/or address microaggressions when being the target or bystander?

Historical Perspective

Microaggressions are negative comments, insults, or derogatory slights directed at a member of a diverse group (Torino et al., 2019). Sue et al. (2007) pointed out that even though the Civil Rights movement brought some change on racial interactions in society, racism is still prevalent in the United States today. Racial microaggressions are “the brief verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, denigrating, and hurtful messages to people of color” (Allen et al., 2013, p. 117). Targets of microaggressions are the recipients of the microaggressions, bystanders are anyone who witnesses the microaggression, and the perpetrators are the ones who state the racial microaggression (Sue et al., 2019).

Researchers Perez-Huber and Solorazano (2015) discussed that racial microaggressions have a purpose and carry out a larger system of racism. Perez-Huber and Solorazano (2015) researched how racial microaggressions can have academic, psychological, and physiological consequences on People of Color. There are different types of microaggressions. These include microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations (Diab et al., 2019; Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2017; Osanloo et al., 2016).

Ogunyemi et al. (2020) defined microinsults as verbal or nonverbal comments that come off as rude, demeaning, or insensitive towards a person's racial identity. Microassaults are explicit derogatory behaviors or remarks that are characterized by verbal or nonverbal attacks that are intended to harm the victim through intentional discrimination, avoidance, or name-calling (Ogunyemi et al., 2020). Microinvalidations are when a person's thoughts, feelings, or experiences are nullified, negated, or excluded through verbal or nonverbal behaviors (Ogunyemi et al., 2020). Diab et al., (2019) pointed out that microinsults and microinvalidations are often unconscious, while microassaults are more often conscious.

The creation of the term microaggression has been credited to Chester Pierce (Torino et al., 2019; Perez-Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Williams, 2021). Pierce was a Black doctor, psychiatrist, and scholar. He researched how the continued everyday accumulation of the subtle experiences of racism effected people the comments were targeted at (Douds, 2020). Pierce conducted a research study in 1977 where he looked at racism in TV commercials. In the

documentation about this study Pierce discussed how skin color is a determining factor on whether a person is to act from a superior or inferior vantage point and also stated that racism is a public health illness in the United States (Pierce et al., 1977). Pierce was the pioneer of the research on microaggressions and was one of the first to argue that the effects that they took on the bodies, minds, and spirits of People of Color were cumulative over time (Perez-Huber & Solorzano, 2015).

Continuing to find evidence of racism in our country Sue et al. (2007) outlined that President Clinton's Race Advisory Board produced a report that concluded that "(a) racism is one of the most divisive forces in our society, (b) racial legacies of the past continue to haunt current policies and practices that create unfair disparities between minority and majority groups, (c) racial inequities are so deeply ingrained in American society that they are nearly invisible, and (d) most White Americans are unaware of the advantages they enjoy in this society and of how their attitudes and actions unintentionally discriminate against persons of color" (p. 271). It was considered important enough of an issue to be included in an Advisory Board statement.

Historically, racism has not just been visible in society in the United States, but racism has also been in schools. The education system in the United States presents and allows a hierarchy that focuses on and enforces majority culture (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). There continues to be evidence that schools are not where they need to be, and that improvement is necessary. This concept of prioritizing the majority culture is something that needs to be examined.

With this historical perspective and the current presence of microaggressions being stated by faculty members in the school it is imperative that action is taken so that history is not repeated or continued. Many racial microaggressions are microinsults and microinvalidations (Torino et al., 2019) made unconsciously. Providing examples of microaggressions sometimes aids in the transition between the competency stages. This ties in with the conscious competence model as work can be done as a community of learners to move out of the unconscious incompetence stage into an area of competence. With professional development and introduction to the concepts of microaggressions, faculty may become aware of their actions and work to change. This in turn could bring healing to affected students and faculty as well as provide a safer learning environment for everyone.

Literature Review Methodology

The research reviewed in this chapter was conducted to create a theoretical framework, research historical perspectives, establish links to social justice and find related research. For this dissertation various search engines and databases were used such as the University of South Carolina online library, ERIC, EBSCO and Google Scholar. The types of sources used consist of textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, websites, dissertations, and scholarly articles.

Theoretical Framework

This action research was grounded on a couple of theories that were used to address the problem of practice. The theoretical framework included the theory

of the conscious competence model and Maslow's theory of motivation with a focus on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The two theories provided the reasoning as to why microaggressions needed to be addressed and the journey of consciousness of faculty as they learned how to acknowledge and address microaggressions.

Conscious Competence Model

The theory of the conscious competence model provided a metacognitive path to look at how a person can be aware, or conscious, of their learning. This tied into microaggressions as many of the teachers were largely unaware that some of their statements were microaggressions. The origination of the conscious competence model is not completely clear, however is most often attributed to William Howell (Cannon et al., 2010). This model allows one to look at the experiential learning process (Wilhelm, 2016). When going through the stages people can obtain power to take action (Yang et al., 2022). This model allows learning to be looked at through the different dimensions of competence and consciousness; then looking at these through the progression of four stages starting at unconscious incompetence then to conscious incompetence then conscious competence and finally to unconscious competence (Cannon et al., 2010).

The first stage of the model is unconscious incompetence (Howell, 1982). This stage is where people are unaware of what they do not know. People in this stage are unaware of the knowledge gap that exists between them and the learning that needs to take place (Das & Biswas, 2018).

The second stage is conscious incompetence (Howell, 1982). In this stage people become aware of what they do not know (Das & Biswas, 2018). Here, people realize there is a gap in knowledge and the skills to address it.

The third stage is conscious competence (Howell, 1982). This stage allows the person to begin to develop solutions or paths to solutions but with concentration and awareness of their work. In this stage people are aware of what they know and can use their knowledge to address problems or perform tasks (Lane & Roberts, 2022). Additionally, a person in this stage is hyperaware and may be nervous about making mistakes (Kersey-Matusiak, 2018).

The fourth stage is unconscious competence (Howell, 1982). This stage allows for the person to perform or conduct their new learning without thinking about it as it will come naturally to them (Das & Biswas, 2018). This stage is at times referred to as a mastery stage (Lane & Roberts, 2022).

By diving into the presence of microaggressions in the school, the school community could transition through stages of the conscious competence model to take strides in providing a culturally relevant, supportive, and welcoming school community for students and faculty. Many people in the school were in the unconscious incompetence stage of the learning model. Some teachers were stating microaggressions and were unaware the comments were harmful to people and inappropriate, or that what was being stated qualified as a microaggression. If the school can examine the presence, use, and history of microaggressions they could move into the conscious incompetence stage and then into the conscious competence stage. This was the goal of the professional

development and school interventions sections. The ultimate goal of using this model was to progress into the unconscious competence stage and be able to tackle other issues as well.

Maslow's Theory of Motivation

The theory of motivation was developed by Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist. Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation holds that humans are motivated by two categories of needs which include basic needs as well as deficiency and growth needs; and that these two categories are hierarchically related to each other (Nguyen & Gordon, 2022). His theory is based on this conclusion and was used to develop his Hierarchy of Needs.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs provided an additional foundation and delivered the reason as to why the problem of practice needed to be addressed. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is from Maslow's theory of motivation and has a tiered model outlining human needs and is often explained using a pyramid depicting a hierarchy system (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023). The five needs are organized in an order of hierarchy. They include physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023).

The first stage in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy is the physiological needs stage. The physiological needs are seen as the starting point for motivation theory (Maslow, 1943). This stage includes the need for air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, and reproduction (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023). This is the most

important stage, and the body cannot function well if these needs are not met (Maslow, 1943).

The second stage is the safety needs stage. This includes the need for safety and security (Fisher & Royster, 2016). This stage was the focus for using this theory in the theoretical framework section and was also one of the anchors used in securing teacher buy-in.

The third stage is the love and belongingness needs stage. This level includes friendship, intimacy, family, and sense of connection (Fisher & Royster, 2016). Maslow (1943) pointed out that the humans' behavior is motivated through interpersonal relationships.

Lastly, there are the fourth and fifth stages. The fourth stage is the esteem needs stage. This stage is broken into two categories: esteem for oneself and the need to be accepted and valued by others (Maslow, 1943). Fisher and Crawford (2020) stated that in this stage children and adolescents hold respect and respectability in highest regard. The fifth stage is the self-actualization needs stage. This stage is where people seek their full potential. It includes the desire for one to accomplish everything they can as well as being the best they can be (Fisher & Crawford, 2020).

The lower needs are crucial and need to be addressed before the other needs can be focused on (Fisher & Crawford, 2020). Maslow (1943) emphasized that the basic needs are not met or satisfied, then the individual may not reach the other stages and the other needs may become nonexistent. This is crucial as

students need to have their physiological needs met before they can be expected to do anything else.

The needs are grouped into three groups; basic needs, which are the physiological and safety needs; psychological needs, which are the belongingness and esteem needs; and lastly self-fulfillment needs, which includes the self-actualization need (Fisher & Crawford, 2020). With safety being included in the basic needs category it is apparent how important it is. Many teachers question why attendance is required at certain professional developments or seminars. Maslow's (1943) theory provided the theoretical framework for the second part of the research questions and the purpose statement. It is important that students feel safe in their own learning environment. Not meeting the lower level and higher-level needs could have negative impacts, such as leading to depression in adolescents (Crandall et al., 2020). It is irresponsible and unfair for anyone to expect certain levels of student achievement and performance if students do not feel safe in their own classroom.

Examples of Microaggressions

Examples of microaggressions were provided in research by Mekawi and Todd (2018) and Torino et al. (2019). The examples given provided insight for readers as well as examples of the racial microaggressions that have been received and recorded through their research.

- There is only one race, the human race.
- You speak good English.

- When I look at you, I do not see color.
- I am not racist. I have several Black friends.
- A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a Person of Color is on it.
- A Person of Color is mistaken for a service worker.
- People are just people. Their race does not matter.
- Minorities are just too sensitive about racism.
- Everyone is treated the same by the legal system.
- A store owner following a Person of Color around the store.

Impact of Microaggressions

With the combination of literature proving the harmful impacts of racism and discrimination (Robinson-Perez, 2021) as well as the research about the detrimental impacts of racial microaggressions (Torino et al., 2019) it is imperative that this impact be examined and addressed. Racial microaggressions have cumulative and negative mental effects on people (Robinson-Perez, 2021). This section looked at the psychological and physiological harm created by racial microaggressions.

There is ample research available to show that racial microaggressions are harmful (Douds & Hout, 2020; Ogunyemi et al., 2020; Robinson-Perez, 2021). Even with presence of outward interpersonal racism, intentional or unintentional covert racist acts are becoming more frequent in today's society (Evans et al., 2021). There are harmful outcomes connected to racial microaggressions that include psychological stress, high blood pressure,

depression, sleeping problems, substance abuse, eating disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), difficulty concentrating, difficulty remembering, distrust, confusion, shame, guilt, anger, and self-blame (Torino et al., 2019; Williams, 2020a).

There are other impacts also in addition to psychological ones. Torino et al. (2019) combined results from different studies that concluded that microaggressions have negative consequences associated with mental health and can have negative impacts on interpersonal relationships. Williams (2020a) demonstrated that the impacts of microaggressions reach as far as a possible treatment barrier. Sometimes when microaggressions occur there is a distrust that is formed, and the patient may go as far as avoiding care.

Diab et al. (2019) also provided research stating that microaggressions have been shown to produce negative outcomes such as low self-confidence, low energy levels, mental and physical side effects and even going further to state the effects on the economy and communities. Going further, Sue et al. (2008) examined the perception of minimal harm and the negative consequences, both short-term and long-term, of the constant harmful messages. This study found that the recipients of microaggressions were able to categorize their experiences into one of five domains: incident, perception, reaction, interpretation, and consequence (Sue et al., 2008). It was also found that recipients were able to relate to the experiences of other recipients of microaggressions (Sue et al., 2008). Connecting the relationship between microaggressions and the educational setting, Winter et al. (2017), pointed out

the need for more research regarding microaggressions in schools as microaggressions have been found to be harmful and ones that happen in the educational setting hurt the self-worth of the students. Due to the harm microaggressions can cause in the educational setting, it is important to identify the underlying issues that contribute to an environment where microaggressions are present.

Factors Causing Microaggressions

There are multiple factors that lead to microaggressions. This section looked at implicit bias and racial battle fatigue as such causes. It is important to understand the factors causing racial microaggressions in order move any school forward and help support students who need to feel safe in order to learn.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is an unconscious and invisible way of thinking that drives an individual's behavior (De Houwer, 2019). Gonzalez et al. (2018) described implicit bias as the invisible unconscious assumptions individuals make. Many people guilty of making racial microaggressions see themselves as good humans who believe in equality. Thus, they find it difficult to believe that they have any thoughts or attitudes of bias or that they have portrayed any behaviors that were suggestive of being discriminatory (Ogunyemi et al., 2020). Biases at times manifest in unconscious ways (Turner et al., 2021).

Implicit biases are impossible to see and are unconscious; however, they are one of the factors contributing to the spread of microaggressions and need to be addressed. Ogunyemi et al. (2020) discussed a similar concept of blind spots

and defined them as unseen biases that form from experiences throughout an individual's life. Torino et al. (2019) pointed out that implicit racial biases, when manifested, can cause detrimental effects to people.

Beachum and Gullo (2020) discussed in their research that implicit bias can have negative impacts through different avenues such as teacher expectations, student access, and curriculum bias. Their research provided a combined focus on school leadership and the impacts of implicit bias and inequity in schools. The presence of implicit bias can cause confusion for students and provide yet another hurdle for students to being successful in the classroom.

Beachum and Gullo (2020) discussed the benefits of having a framework for effective social justice leadership for school leaders. A social justice-oriented school leadership team can decrease and remediate the impact that implicit bias has on students through relationships and flexibility (Beachum & Gullo, 2020). This includes focusing on implicit bias-related interventions. Educational leaders have been linked with being integral players in the progression of social justice in education and hold the responsibility of being social justice agents in establishing a culturally responsive school. (Gumus et al., 2021). For social justice to happen in the education setting, equal access to and quality of education must be available for all students, regardless of their background (Gumus et al., 2021).

Racial Battle Fatigue

Racial battle fatigue (RBF) is described by Torino et al. (2019) as involving the collective and continuing impact of the daily experiences of racial

microaggressions as well as other forms of racism which have negative consequences on an individual's mental and physical health. This fatigue renders many of our students and colleagues tired and unaware of how to continue to push back or stand up. Some students even reported a sense of feeling drained both mentally and physically as a result of the constant need to defend against or cope with the targeted racial microaggressions (Hernandez & Villodas, 2020). Racial battle fatigue can be individual or group level (Smith et al., 2016).

It is imperative that a safe environment is created, and that strategies and training are put into place for this to happen. Microaggressions from White teachers could be the catalyst for racial battle fatigue in students. White teachers tend to consider racism as outward and aggressive acts; however, do not always recognize the existence of the more subtle forms of racism. (Call-Cummings & Martinez, 2017).

Interventions and Strategies

The continued presence of racial microaggressions may be due to the unseen nature of the hurtful comment by the perpetrator and even sometimes the target (Ogunyemi et al., 2020). Once the reason for conducting the professional development on microaggressions was established with faculty and the research and findings were provided to faculty, there was enough teacher buy-in to start making strides towards improvements. It was imperative to create a strategic and careful roll out of the professional development. Learning is a major piece of change in schools (Soini et al., 2016). This section looked at professional development and school interventions.

Professional Development

Preparing teachers to work with students and build relationships is key to success in any school setting (Tanase, 2019). Thurber and DiAngelo (2018) advised that working on microaggressions does not have an easy or quick solution and compared it to a lifelong journey that is fueled by discomfort, desperation, and a feeling of not having control. Microaggressions were the focus of the professional development and the ideal improvement; however, research shows that there needs to be more addressed than microaggressions themselves (Turner et al., 2021).

Even while addressing the multiple reasons that are needed to learn more about microaggressions and how to prevent them, some teachers may still question the necessity. Sue et al. (2009) described some of the difficult conversations that occur in the classroom when microaggressions are stated and how the perpetrator is oblivious to the meaning of their statement or the harmful impact. This lack of awareness at times provides a layer of deception, which makes it easier for many White people to not see the nature of the racism. (Sue et al., 2009). This could lead to large mistrust of the teacher by the student.

One suggestion is to provide teachers with training on how to have difficult conversations with students and faculty about race. Teachers may avoid uncomfortable conversations if they do not feel prepared to have them. Sue (2015) discussed that even when such critical matters such as bigotry and discrimination arise, the consequences of these discussions have been avoided,

ignored, resisted, and/or diminished by political leaders, some citizens, and even some educators.

Another emphasis of some research was on the role of the principal or administration of the school. Faculty and students look to the principal for guidance. Some schools have discussions around social justice; however, this may not be enough. Osanloo et al. (2015) discussed how administrators that have a social justice lens try to avoid deficit thinking and make it their objective to foster schools that are safe. Soini et al. (2016) stressed the importance of the principal and how strong leadership can drive change. Nooruddin and Bhamani (2019) also emphasized the importance of the role of school leaders and how it leads to student achievement. Another recommendation made was to assess administrators, faculty, and student perceptions of racial inclusivity.

School Interventions

School interventions can take many forms and can range from small changes to actual implementation of new policies. Although new policies implemented to address equity would be ideal, any change would be welcomed. Torino et al. (2019) discussed how the culmination of current research on microaggressions provides policymakers, investigators, and practitioners with enough evidence to prove that the harmful impact is not just random acts and suggests that there needs to be action taken as this is a significant public health issue.

Williams et al. (2020) demonstrated the benefits of using both traditional and more modern interventions in schools. They highlighted the use of the racial

harmony workshop in their study. This workshop provided great opportunities for deep discussion and potential for connectedness between faculty members, racial barrier breakdown as well as growth towards a culturally responsive school environment.

Although coming from a medical education lens instead of a school education one, Young et al. (2020) pointed out that while many feel called to action to improve, many feel unprepared as to how to change. They outline four steps as an approach for addressing microaggressions: societal, institutional, educator and learner dyad, and lastly, educator as individual.

- Societal addressed root causes and recommends training on equity.
- Institutional called for diverse leadership with advancement opportunities.
- Educator and learner dyad recommended safe spaces for critical reflection and opportunities for disclosure.
- Educator as individual was multi-layered and included education, self-reflection, implicit bias and allyship training, and intervening with witnessed events. This reflection could be key to getting closer to the unconscious competence stage.

Another avenue for improvement is better or different school curriculum or programming. Striving and advocating for quality diversity education is important (Williams, 2020b). This allows teachers to develop strategies to be equipped to teach all students. Sue et al. (2019) outlined four strategic goals in their research

to lead change for organizations in the area of microaggressions. These strategic goals included bringing the microaggressions to light, taking power away from the microaggressions, providing professional development for the offender, and looking for outside intervention if needed.

- The first strategic goal was to make the “invisible” visible (Sue et al. (2019). This included actions such as asking for feedback from colleagues and students, and monitoring trends around recruiting, hiring, retention and promotion, as well as others.
- The second strategic goal was to disarm the microaggression, taking power away from stated microaggressions. This included expressing disagreement, stating values, setting limits, interrupting, and redirecting, revising and vetoing unjust community policies, and others (Sue et al., 2019).
- The third strategic goal was to educate the offender. This was important and included but was not limited to differentiating between intent and impact, institute long-term mandated training, challenge silence/lack of response to microaggressions, and infusing multicultural principles into mission and values.
- The fourth strategic goal was to seek external intervention if needed. This goal included but was not limited to alerting authorities, reporting the act, reporting inequitable practices to your union, and fostering cooperation over competition.

Interventions in the workplace are a good place to start for combating microaggressions. Some of the interventions could include diversity training, focus on leadership behaviors, recruitment, mentoring programs and more (Torino et al., 2019). Combining the four strategic goals from Sue et al. (2019) to lead change for organizations with the four steps as an approach for addressing microaggressions outlined by Young et al. (2020) schools could have a solid approach to stopping the manifestation of microaggressions and starting a path towards improvement in school culture.

Related Research

Beaulieu (2016) used a weeklong recording of lessons from a third-grade classroom in Southern California to provide an exemplar to new teachers in a certification program that was studying classroom discourse. The teacher in the recordings was originally described as a culturally responsive and outstanding teacher. In this study Beaulieu (2016) defined microaggressions, focused on studies of teacher-student relationships, looked at studies on disparities in the classroom, and highlighted findings of his research. The methodology of this study included recordings of five day-long sessions with cameras placed in the four corners of the classroom. The cameras were elevated so that the interactions of students and the teacher could be always seen. A microphone was also attached to each camera to pick up the sounds and discussions from the room. Transcripts were developed from the five sessions and the decision for the designated focus was the literacy lessons that were taught during the week. The main source of analysis for this study was multiple viewings and discourse

after the viewings. In looking at the findings of Beaulieu's (2016) research, the teacher's sense of warmth towards all her students is emphasized; however, there are elements of her teaching that brought some questions to the viewers. It is pointed out that the teacher used a different tone of voice towards some students when compared to others and also highlights other inequities shown towards certain genders or races of students.

Importantly, the findings showed that at the start of the research study the teacher was held as a model teacher who was culturally responsive; however, after watching the recordings this was not the same feeling of many viewers. Beaulieu (2016) stated that the original dysfunction was not noticed by colleagues, leading to the belief that microaggressions are unconscious and hard to notice. The limitation of these results only being from one week of recordings from one classroom are stated. The information though, despite the limitations, was useful and could help prevent the use of microaggressions in classrooms from teachers. This research highlighted a teacher that is highly respected and held as an exemplar teacher. With a deep look into the everyday interactions there are many unintentional but harmful interactions. This study provided a great resource and platform for reflection for teachers in all classroom settings.

Smith et al. (2016) investigated the experiences of Black male students who attended different historically elite White institutions. The institutions included Harvard University, Michigan State University, University of California Berkeley, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Michigan, and the University of Michigan Law School. The study outlined the definition of racial

microaggressions, methodology of the research, interlocking systems of racism and the data analysis. For this study, there were thirty-six self-identified Black male participants, and the focus was on investigating how the experience of persistent Black stereotypes produced psychological symptoms of racial battle fatigue. Three research questions were asked to each participant via interviews or semi-structured interviews.

The results of the study showed that Black males reported being the recipients of various forms of racial microaggressions. Repeating themes were also noted which included Black stereotyping and marginality as well as hyper surveillance and control. Although all participants reported feeling that the college environment was more hostile and unwelcoming towards Black males, there were differing levels of severity in racial microaggressions that were recorded. It was also found that Black males were seen more often as street-smart than book-smart which was attributed to the ghetto-specific stereotype.

Smith et al. (2016) concluded that the perpetrators of racial microaggressions were not always obvious racist individuals. In the findings of the study faculty members, administrators and students sometimes interfered with or blocked the goals for many Black students (Smith et al., 2016). This can serve as a warning and hopefully a call to action for many schools, universities, and communities. There were unconscious and subtle statements and actions being made by people in many positions that were causing harm for students.

Hernandez and Villodas (2020) used the racial microaggression scale (RMAS) in their research as well as a demographic questionnaire and the brief

symptom inventory. The study was conducted to determine if different coping styles mediated the connection between racial microaggressions and mental health. There were 681 participants that were recruited through email invitations. This study was connected to Torres-Harding et al. (2012) where the racial microaggression scale is covered in detail. The findings of this study showed that different coping strategies or methods brought about different results. The conclusion was clear that experiencing racial microaggressions may contribute to poorer mental health. Reflective coping strategies were found to have a connection with more positive mental health. These reflective coping styles included activities that promoted progress in resolving stressful events. However, suppressive, or reactive coping styles or strategies led to poorer mental health. The findings of this study could help structure professional development around coping strategies but more importantly draw light on the fact that people are having to use strategies to help cope with comments or actions that are harmful but could be avoided with some provided information and discussion.

Li (2019) conducted a study examining the different forms and effects of racial microaggressions through everyday practices. The study also looked at the relationship between racial microaggressions and institutionalized racism. The data for this study was collected over a 16-month fieldwork study. This fieldwork study included participant observation and in-depth interviews. Li (2019) found there are times people are not fully aware of microaggressions or not offended by the comment; however, highlighted that uncomfortable feelings or feelings of being offended were often common results. People were unconscious at times

that what was being said qualified as a microaggression. Li (2019) concluded that both institutionalized racism and racial microaggressions are rooted in racial thoughts and beliefs. The findings encouraged organizations to continue to examine how recipients of racial microaggressions responded to the comment or action and how they perceived themselves after. This could lead to positive structural change in a school or organizational setting.

Williams et al. (2020) researched interventions that would be useful in combating racial microaggressions. They began the study by acknowledging the existence of racial microaggressions, providing definitions of racial microaggression, detailing the harmful effects of the hurtful comments or actions, describing their study parameters, and providing a unique intervention strategy. Participants for this study were recruited via different avenues such as flyers, courses, emails, and social media posts. Not all volunteers were selected to participate in the study as 373 people were screened, 282 were considered eligible but only 49 were invited and agreed to attend the provided workshop. Williams et al. (2020) stated that 44 people completed the study. The participants in the study were all college students. The students were split into two groups of twenty-two and a pretest and post-test were administered. The workshop this study centered around is called the racial harmony workshop (RHW), a diversity workshop structured to be educational by using the participants' experiences and diversity to encourage social connection and sharing (Williams et al., 2020).

The findings of this study provided very encouraging results. The study used a more traditional intervention diversity training for the control group and the

racial harmony workshop for the other group. The study showed that there are benefits of traditional diversity training experiences and emphasized the additional benefits of also using the racial harmony workshop. Williams et al. (2020) pointed out that the racial harmony workshop is an intervention based in contextual behavioral science. Results included improved attitudes and less racism from White participants towards Black participants as well as engagement in cross-racial interactions as compared to the control group. The results showed that both Black and White students had reports of high satisfaction from both interventions, however, the White students benefited more from the racial harmony workshop. The study also highlighted benefits from improved intergroup relationships which include improved well-being and achievement of students of color, improved sense of connectedness, increased racial awareness, and improved interracial connectedness. All of these provided important reasons to consider using this intervention in schools.

DeCuir-Gunby and Gunby (2016) conducted a study examining the relation between racial microaggressions and job satisfaction. For this study, the participants included 75 Black educators from primary schools, secondary schools, and higher education. The instruments for this study included a demographics questionnaire and four surveys. The study did well to conclude important findings that could help in educational settings. The researchers concluded that it is important to prepare future educators. DeCuir-Gunby and Gunby (2016) found evidence of racial microaggressions from educators in primary, secondary, and higher education. Due to that finding it is suggested that

it is necessary to prepare future teachers to better understand what racial microaggressions are and how they manifest in the workplace. The study also suggested that there is a definite need for diversity training in schools as this could help prevent the use of microaggressions. Lastly, the recommendation is made for recruiting and retaining Black educators, suggestions to do this included being more welcoming to diverse perspective employees and being welcoming to many cultures.

The studies in the related research section demonstrated many findings that indicate a strong need to address microaggressions. The studies showed the harm caused by microaggressions, the benefits of addressing and acknowledging microaggressions, and give recommendations and suggestions on how to pursue change. Combining the research and findings from the preceding studies, it is crucial that microaggressions are acknowledged and addressed with immediacy.

Chapter Summary

Acknowledging microaggressions from faculty members to students and other faculty at the school level is integral in moving the school forward to a culturally responsive learning environment. It is important that every student feels safe at school and feel as though they can trust the teachers, faculty, and administrators. The research and literature reviewed in this chapter outlined a path to do this.

Addressing microaggressions is similar to acknowledging the tip of the iceberg. As a community of learners, we have a long way to go in addressing all

the racial inequities that plague our building. Coming to the table together to learn about unconscious incompetence may be the first step.

Using the conscious competence learning model brought awareness to teacher consciousness or unconsciousness about what is being stated. It provided a framework for the work that was needed and the mindset in which it was needed to be done with. It also provided a goal, to strive towards unconscious competence.

Using Maslow's (1943) motivation theory and specifically focusing on the hierarchy of needs provided part of the framework for why the work needed to be done. It also provided ample reasoning as to why it is important for students to feel safe. Safety is one of the basic needs of a human. If a student does not feel safe in their own classroom, it is unfair to assume any learning will occur.

The remaining research and literature reviewed in this chapter provided an avenue to improvement and strategies on how to get there, as well as looked at the impact of microaggressions on students and faculty that were on the receiving end of the hurtful and detrimental comments or actions. Once teachers come into the conscious incompetence stage and learn about the impacts microaggressions have on students and fellow colleagues, hopefully there will be an eagerness and urgency to learn about the deficits and ways to improve. It is evident through research and literature findings that there is a lot of learning and work to be done in this area.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview of Study

When students and faculty enter a school building there are basic elements or some minimal expectations that should be present and guaranteed to everyone. Porter et al. (2021) stated that having a sense of school belonging for students has a direct correlation to positive outcomes. Having a sense of belonging and feeling safe while learning in school should be an absolute for all students and feeling loved and respected should accompany this. A sense of belonging should not be questioned in a classroom or school community (Almeida, 2018). Maslow (1943) discussed in his theory of motivation and outlined in his hierarchy of needs how basic needs of humans must be met before anything else can be expected. This is key in being able to create a culturally responsive learning community for students and all community members. If they do not feel safe or do not have a sense of belonging, then academic achievement will not be attainable (Almeida, 2018). Microaggressions hinder this goal and should be acknowledged, addressed, and avoided. This mixed methods action research study addressed an unfortunate problem where faculty members were committing microaggressions towards students and/or other faculty members. The stated microaggressions were at times made without the perpetrator knowing that they were inappropriate and harmful. This

interrupted or prevented the presence of a culturally responsive learning community for students and faculty.

Microaggressions have become additional barriers for students that only add to other issues that are also present in schools. Bullying, hate-filled threats and behaviors are on the rise in schools and society that is centrally focused on race, sex, religion, ability and more (Kavanagh et al., 2021). Microaggressions add to this troubling trend and interfere with students' ability to have a sense of belonging and safety in their own school building.

Research Questions

1. In evaluating the impact of microaggressions, what themes emerged as a result of analyzing the types of microaggressions present and the effects of the microaggressions on the targeted person?
2. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on teachers' awareness of microaggressions?
3. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on how teachers respond and/or address microaggressions when being the target or bystander?

Review of the Purpose of Study

The purpose of this action research dissertation was to help faculty members of an elementary school to get to the conscience competence part of the conscience model where they are independently able to acknowledge the

presence of microaggressions, address microaggressions when they occur, and interrupt microaggressions when witnessed. More importantly, the purpose was to deepen the faculty's understanding in how to avoid making microaggressions. This level of awareness within the school would then help create a more culturally sensitive learning community. Based on the observation of the researcher, some faculty members were in the unconscious incompetent stage (Keeley, 2021) as it related to microaggressions. An example of this was when a teacher responded to a students' comment about the teacher being racist by saying that they had a friend who was Black, therefore they could not be racist. The teacher was unaware that this was a microaggression and that it was dismissive as well as a bit hurtful to the student. The teacher was unaware of what they did not know, which serves as an example of unconscious incompetence (Cannon et al., 2010).

Research Design and Rationale

There are many types of research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that "basic research is motivated by intellectual interest in a phenomenon and has as its goal the extension of knowledge" (p. 3). Action research was utilized as the research method for this dissertation in practice. Action research is a form of applied research, which focuses on facilitating change (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Efron and Ravid (2020) go further and defined action research as inquiry done by teachers in their school or setting with the purpose of increasing student learning and improving their own practice. Action research looks to understand how participants interpret a problem or phenomenon and furthermore how to solve or

improve the problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using action research helps close the gap between teaching practice and traditional educational research as well as decrease the time gap in between the information gathered from traditional research and classroom application (Laudonia et al., 2018).

In addition to action research, a mixed methods study design was utilized. Mixed methods research includes using multiple data collection methods and combining the qualitative and quantitative data in a singular research study (Christ, 2018). Qualitative research explores the meaning and understanding that groups or individuals attribute to human and/or social problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative research investigates the relationship between different variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The rationale for using mixed methods research was multi-faceted. Using only one method limits the possible outcomes when analyzing the data. Parr et al. (2021) stated that even though quantitative research and methods can provide good empirical data, it still lacks the informative clarity and detailed findings that qualitative methods can provide. Using a mixed methods approach allowed the researcher to triangulate quantitative and qualitative data to examine how researching microaggressions in the school helped improve the ability to create a culturally responsive learning community. Using this approach also allowed the researcher to use multiple data collection instruments, which provided a wider range of possible data to be collected.

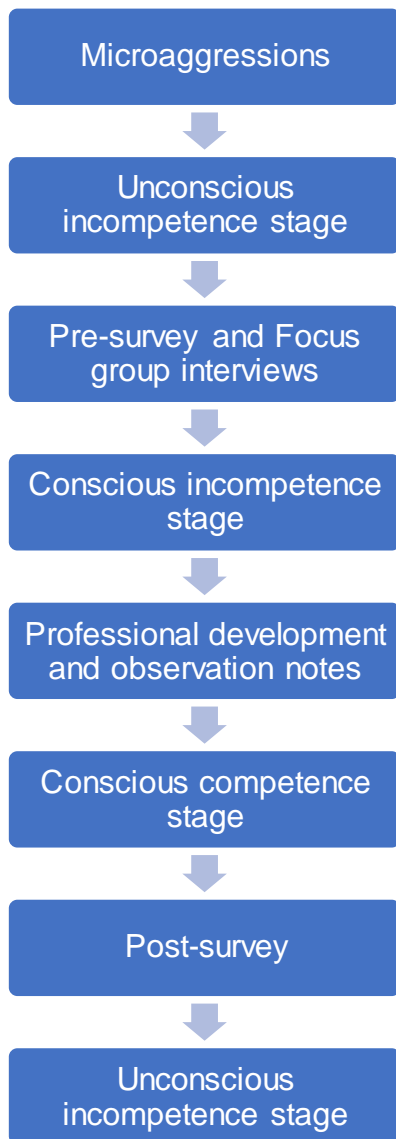


Figure 3.1 Progression Through Conscious Competence Stages

Intervention

The intervention in this mixed methods action research study was the professional development training sessions that focused on acknowledging and addressing microaggressions in the school. One of the goals of the intervention was to increase awareness of microaggressions for the participants so that they could positively contribute to the furthering of a culturally responsive learning

community. Another goal was to present participants with enough information to deepen their understanding of how to avoid making microaggressions. The data collection for the study consisted of multiple components. Focus group interviews, pre- and post-surveys, and observations with observation field notes were used throughout. The focus group interview was conducted separately from the professional development training sessions and consisted of three participants, who also participated in the training sessions. This served as the qualitative component of the study. The goal of the focus group interviews was to uncover any themes in any microaggressions that were happening in the school.

For the quantitative component of the study pre- and post-surveys were administered. The pre-survey was conducted prior to professional development beginning and included a scale response option. The goal of the pre-survey was to collect initial feelings, understandings, and potential presence of microaggressions. The post-survey was administered at the end of the last professional development training session and used almost identical questions to the pre-survey while also using a scale response option. The pre-surveys and post-surveys were used to evaluate participants' understandings and conscious competence model position before and after professional development.

Setting and Context of Research Study

The school this action research dissertation took place at is in upstate New York. The school is an elementary school in a large suburban school district located directly outside one of the top five largest cities in New York State. The elementary school has approximately 800 students, approximately 100 faculty

members and serves grades Kindergarten through Fifth Grade. The student population is 15% Black or African American, 26% Hispanic or Latino, 4% Asian or Native Hawaiian, 47% White, and 8% Multiracial. Although the student population is increasing in diversity, the teaching faculty is not. The teaching faculty is over 90% White.

The faculty participants who attended the professional development training sessions covered many grade levels. Participants included teachers of grade levels kindergarten through fifth grade, reading teachers, special education teachers, exploratory subject teachers, support staff, administration, and instructional coaches. Twenty of the twenty-one participants that completed the professional development training sessions were female.

Role of Researcher

Schools have recently been known as meaningful locations to conduct research (Bergmark, 2020). Action research is known as a process that allows for self-reflective inquiry and collaboration conducted by members of a social situation with the goal of improving their own practices (Efron & Ravid, 2020). The researcher for this dissertation is a tenured fifth grade teacher in the building where the research was conducted. The researcher was also the facilitator of the school equity team and part of the district equity fellowship program. Within these programs, for this dissertation the researcher led the professional development sessions and made sure all anonymous pre- and post- surveys were completed as well as all make-up sessions were held for participants who missed any sessions due to illness or other unavoidable conflicts.

Participants

Participants were recruited through email that was sent to faculty via school email addresses. The email was sent to all faculty, which included all teachers, administrators, and any other programs working within the school. It was a voluntary participation option through professional development.

Participants were given a letter of invitation to participate (Appendix A).

Participants worked at the school where the research took place. The researcher was a participant observer and active participant throughout the research study.

The subgroup that participated in the focus group interview portion of the study consisted of three faculty members that were interviewed about their experiences with microaggressions in general and at the school. The three participants in the interview also participated in all professional development training sessions. Out of approximately 100 faculty members, 23 participants signed up, however only 21 completed the professional development training. Out of the 21 participants that completed the training 20 were female and one was male; additionally, of the 21 participants, two participants were Black, one participant was West Indian, one participant was Hispanic, and 17 participants were White.

Table 3.1 Personnel Type of Participants

Personnel Type	Total
Administrators	1
Teachers	17
Interventionists	3

Data Collection Instruments

This action research dissertation study used multiple measures. The data instruments consisted of a pre-survey, a post-survey, focus group interview, participant observations, researcher observations, and professional development training sessions. These instruments allowed for qualitative and quantitative data to be collected.

Table 3.2 Data Collection Instruments

Data Collection Instrument
Pre – and Post-Survey
Focus Group Interviews
Observations (Participant and Researcher)

Table 3.3 Data Collection Methods

Research Question (RQ)	Data source(s)
RQ 1: In evaluating the impact of microaggressions, what themes emerged as a result of analyzing the types of microaggressions present and the effects of the microaggressions on the targeted person?	Interviews and observation field notes
RQ 2: What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on teacher awareness of microaggressions?	Pre- and post-surveys from professional development

	training, observation field notes
RQ 3: What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on how teachers respond and/or address microaggressions when being the target or bystander?	Pre- and post-surveys from professional development training, observation field notes

Pre- and Post-Survey

The pre-survey was conducted before the beginning of the six professional development sessions and the post-survey was given at the end of the last professional development session. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed how survey research looks at a population phenomenon and explains how variables are dispersed across it. Surveys are one of the most efficient methods of collecting information (Efron & Ravid, 2020). The researcher analyzed the data collected from the pre- and post-surveys. The pre-survey was administered to twenty-one participants before professional development began. The survey included a Likert scale response option and was given to the twenty-one teachers who participated in the professional development. The survey included the following questions:

- Rate your understanding about what microaggressions are?

- Rate your understanding about how microaggressions affect others?
- Have you heard or experienced any derogatory slights or insults directed at you?
- Have you experienced any derogatory slights or insults directed at other staff members?
- Have you experienced any derogatory slights or insults directed towards students?
- Do you feel comfortable addressing any derogatory slights or insults?
- How would you rate the occurrence and presence of any derogatory slights or insults in our school targeted at students? (Scale of 1-5, with 1 being none and 5 being heard/witnessed multiple times daily.)
- How would you rate the occurrence and presence of any derogatory slights or insults in our school targeted at staff members? (Scale of 1-5, with 1 being none and 5 being heard/witnessed multiple times daily.)

A post-survey was administered to participants after the professional development training that mostly mirrored the questions asked during the initial survey, with the main differences being the insertion of the term microaggression in place of *any derogatory slights or insults*. This was done due to the possibility of some participants not knowing the definition of microaggressions when completing the initial survey. The collection of data and analysis of responses was compared to the initial survey. The results were used to determine if the

professional development provided was beneficial to the development of a safer, more culturally sensitive learning environment for elementary aged students.

Focus Group Interviews

Interviews become a necessity when observing people’s behaviors, feelings, and understandings of the world is not possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There was an initial focus group interview with a small subgroup of participants which consisted of three teachers, and one follow up focus group interview with the same teachers. The interviews were conducted to record microaggressions received, witnessed, or heard of by allowing the participants to share their firsthand accounts. Participants were able to share their stories of microaggressions and the feelings they experienced during and after. The interviewer asked participants to share how they reacted, and what caused this reaction, or lack of reaction. This was used to understand the school environment and faculty members’ experiences with being a target of or witnessing microaggressions. Although the intention of the researcher was to audio record the interviews, this did not happen as some of the participants felt uncomfortable with that. Instead, notes were taken during the interview responses.

Table 3.4 Focus Group Interview Questions

Interview	Question #	Questions
Interview 1	1	Have you witnessed or been the target of a microaggression here at school? If so, would you share what was said to you?

Interview 1	2	Was the perpetrator a student or staff member?
Interview 1	3	Can you describe the feelings you had after the microaggression was stated to you?
Interview 2	1	Now that we have discussed the themes and patterns from the responses from interview 1, what are some things that you think attributed to these microaggressions?
Interview 2	2	Since our last interview, have you thought of any other microaggressions that you have been the target of or is there anything else you would like to add?

Observations

Using data obtained from observations allows for a firsthand encounter with a situation rather than relying on a secondhand retelling obtained from through interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observations are a means of collecting qualitative data (Mertler, 2020). Observations involve carefully viewing and thoroughly recording everything that is going on in a certain setting (Mertler, 2020). During the professional developments, the researcher took field notes, which are the reports of everything that was observed by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the researcher provided the professional development training, most of the observations were done during group

discussions where the researcher was only an observer and not a participant. Observation protocol includes detailed explanations of what the researcher sees, hears, and feels during the observation and what prompted these thoughts and feelings (Efron & Ravid, 2020).

Research Procedures

Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) stated that professional development is more effective when done in a group. McChesney and Aldridge (2019) also added that positive professional development includes opportunities for collaboration and active learning. During the six-session professional development training the researcher presented information on what microaggressions are, how to avoid making them, and how to address microaggressions when encountered as a target or bystander. The researcher acted as an observer during discussions and did not participate in the small groups as a group member. Data collection for this section was mostly participant observer with field notes taken during the professional development trainings. The professional development was focused on microaggressions and how as a group of fellow faculty members the journey through the stages of the conscious competence model was worked through. The intervention of professional development and the discussion that became of the training was the bulk of the research for this study. As McChesney and Aldridge (2019) alluded the collaboration through discussion and humble honesty was a large part in the active learning of the participants.

Table 3.5 Research Timeline

Study phase	Duration	Major tasks
Phase 1	1 week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select subgroup for interviews • Conduct focus group interviews • Take field notes • Select larger group for professional development
Phase 2	6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct pre-survey • Provide professional development sessions • Provide participants with observational tool • Record field notes • Conduct post-survey
Phase 3	1 week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete analysis of data collected and share

Session 1 – To begin the first session, participants took the pre-survey. The following topics were covered after the survey, history of microaggressions, definitions of microaggressions, review of what Maslow’s hierarchy of needs covers, and introduction of what the conscious competence model is. The researcher discussed the work of Chester Pierce and detailed his life

experiences and how that played a role in his research on microaggressions. To accompany the discussion around Dr. Pierce, the participants of the training session viewed a video about Dr. Pierce.

Discussion questions covered in this session:

- Are microaggressions always unintentional and unconscious?
- Can mascots, media, and offensive symbols be expressions of microaggressions?
- Is it a microaggression if it is someone older because they have grown up saying it?

Session 2 – The second training session began with a review of the definition of microaggressions and what was discussed at the last professional development training. Session 2 covered different examples of microaggressions. In this training it was emphasized that microaggressions do not always have to be verbal and can be nonverbal, and can even present in the form of media, a flag, or even a mascot. After microaggression examples were given in many categories such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and more; we discussed why and how the microaggressions could be harmful. During this session participants viewed a video on eliminating microaggressions and a second video where teenagers were discussing the different microaggressions they had encountered and how it made them feel. The second half of session two included an activity that analyzed microaggressions and allowed participants to understand how to recognize them. Groups worked through examples of microaggressions and matched the possible interpretations.

Discussion questions covered in this session:

- What was one microaggression example that stood out and how do you think this made the target feel?
- What was an example given that you were not aware was a microaggression?

Session 3 – This professional development training was mostly discussion based. It started with participants watching a video about how to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. The researcher spent most of this session observing group discussions. At the end of the session the researcher explained the group task where participants would take notes and record microaggressions they witnessed around the school for a two-week period. It was emphasized that all information recorded should be anonymous and to not record any names when making notes about microaggressions witnessed.

Session 4 – This professional development session was also mostly discussion based. For most of this session participants separated into small groups to discuss their microaggressions tracking sheet. This session happened directly after the Thanksgiving recess at the school so there were many examples of microaggressions that happened both in the school and outside of school when faculty met with family to celebrate the holiday. The researcher observed the discussions. The last portion of this session involved a discussion about the harmful impacts microaggressions can have on targets.

Session 5 – This session started with a review of the definition of microaggressions, review of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and another deep

discussion about the harmful impacts of microaggressions. This session included a focus on the vocabulary words of target, perpetrator, bystander, and ally. The goal of the session was to learn how, when, and why to interrupt microaggressions when witnessed or received.

Session 6 – During the last of the professional development training sessions participants worked in small groups and practiced interrupting microaggressions. The participants discussed predicted feelings of hearing the microaggressions and fears of how to adequately and courageously interrupt. This session was all discussion based and the researcher acted as an observer. At the very end of the session participants completed the post-survey.

Table 3.6 Professional Development Session Outline

PD Session	Session Length	Topic
1	45-60 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-survey • History of microaggressions • Definition of microaggressions • Review of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs • Introduction of the conscious competence model
2	45-60 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of microaggressions • Why each example is hurtful/harmful • Microaggression activity

3	45-60 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of how being uncomfortable is acceptable • Group task introduction: Observing and recording microaggressions at the school on recording sheet
4	45-60 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review notes and observations from group task • Discuss harmful impacts of microaggressions
5	45-60 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the “why” of learning about microaggressions • Maslow’s hierarchy of needs • Discuss how to interrupt microaggressions
6	45-60 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice addressing microaggressions • Open discussion about microaggressions • Post-survey

Data Analysis Strategies

For this study, a mixed methods action research methodology was used. Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative research methods and techniques into the same research study (Efron & Ravid, 2020). The

researcher used quantitative data and qualitative data using focus group interviews, pre- and post-surveys, observation field notes, and participant field notes. The analysis of the data was conducted by the researcher. This was done in majority after the interviews were completed, pre- and post-surveys were collected, and professional development had been conducted; however, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) allude to, collection and analysis of data is an ongoing process in qualitative research. The purpose of the study and research questions were kept in mind throughout all steps of the process.

Pre- and Post-Surveys

The pre- and post-survey results were used as a quantitative measure in this mixed methods action research study. The pre-survey was conducted at the beginning of session one of the professional development training sessions. The post-survey was conducted at the end of the final session of the professional development sessions. The results were analyzed to determine where participants were in the conscious competence model before the intervention of the professional development training sessions as compared to after the sessions were completed. The researcher used the Likert scale that was used in both the pre- and post-surveys to do this.

Focus Group Interviews

The planned data analysis strategies used for focus group interviews at first was to audio record the interviews and then transcribe the conversation. However, during the first meeting it was evident that this was not going to be possible. A couple of the interview participants did not feel comfortable being

recorded. The researcher instead took notes during the interviews and detailed the responses from the three participants. In the analysis of the data, the researcher coded responses using inductive analysis.

Observations (Participation and Researcher)

Observations allow the researcher to triangulate findings between other data sources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher for this study acted as the presenter for the professional development training sessions; however, acted as an observer once the questions were given during the discussion parts of the sessions. Observations were analyzed using inductive analysis. The researcher analyzed physical setting, participant discussions, verbal and non-verbal communications, analyzed repeated readings of transcripts, and responses to any participant questions.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 provided the overview and methodology for this mixed methods action research study. The chapter outlined the purpose of the study, research design and rationale, described the intervention, detailed the setting and context of the research study, and described the research procedures and data collection instruments. The research procedure outlined the process for the journey of the conscious competence model for the faculty in working with microaggressions. This study was conducted in a large suburban elementary school in upstate New York, where the school has been focusing on creating a welcoming and affirming learning environment as a part of their school improvement efforts. Part of the welcoming and affirming environment goals for this study were to learn how to

acknowledge and address microaggressions to help students and faculty increase their sense of belonging. This chapter also included tables that highlighted the research questions with data sources used to address each question. The timeline outlined the six-week process of the professional development sessions and tasks completed throughout. The results of the data will be further analyzed, displayed, and clarified in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This mixed methods action research study was conducted at an elementary school in the northeast United States. The elementary school the researcher conducted this study at has approximately 800 students and 100 faculty members. Action research is extremely beneficial as it allows best practices to be formed from the data collected at the very school it will help improve (Mertler, 2020). Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative data (Kajamaa et al., 2020; Mertler, 2020). This study used both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and analysis. This included focus group interviews, observations, pre- and post-surveys, as well as field notes from observations during the professional development training sessions. This study included 21 volunteer participants from the faculty who participated in a six-week professional development training.

Professional development holds a crucial and timely place in the educational system. Schools are currently battling achievement gaps brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic (Gonzalez & Bonal, 2021; Klosky et al., 2022). Consequently, teachers need ways to make connections with their students and support in providing an environment which is both academically and culturally

supportive. This professional development intervention focused on providing teachers with training on acknowledging and addressing microaggressions.

At the school this intervention was designed for, microaggressions had been highlighted as a school problem by the administration. One of the goals for the school year had been to create a welcoming and affirming school environment for all students, faculty, and families. The presence of microaggressions was interfering with this. The goal of this intervention was to help in creating a culturally responsive community through studying microaggressions. The goal of action research is to improve teaching practice (Efron & Ravid, 2020) and learning how to acknowledge and address microaggressions would help teachers with this.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this action research dissertation was to learn as a faculty how to acknowledge, address, and avoid making microaggressions in the school community. With an increasing diverse student population and a stagnant non-diverse teaching population, there is a lack of culturally responsive educational practices that the researcher has observed have aided in the presence of microaggressions. Some faculty were stating microaggressions to students and other faculty, sometimes unknowingly. Addressing the issue of microaggressions at the school would help create a more culturally sensitive and responsive learning community. The presence of a culturally responsive learning community would help increase the students' sense of safety and belonging, which is

needed first before any academic achievement can be expected (Crandall et al., 2019; Maslow, 1943).

Research Questions

1. In evaluating the impact of microaggressions, what themes emerged as a result of analyzing the types of microaggressions present and the effects of the microaggressions on the targeted person?
2. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on teacher awareness of microaggressions?
3. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on how teachers respond and/or address microaggressions when being the target or bystander?

Participants

For this mixed methods action research study participants were recruited through an email sent to the entire faculty of the school. The email was sent to all teaching faculty, administration, and members of district programs working within the school. The study was explained in the email and the dates and professional development sessions were outlined. Participation was completely voluntary, and it was explained to all participants at the first professional development session

that the data was being collected for the purpose of this research study. The researcher led the professional development sessions and took field notes during the discussions that took place during the sessions. A total of 23 participants signed up and attended the first professional development session and completed the pre-survey; however, only 21 participants attended all six sessions and took the post-survey. There was a small subgroup of three individuals that participated in the focus group interview portion of the research study. Originally, the researcher was hoping for more participants in the focus group interviews, however, there were only three volunteers. Many individuals said they did not feel comfortable sharing, they have never experienced a microaggression, or they did not know what microaggressions were, hence the reason they signed up for the training. The subgroup participants were interviewed about their experiences with microaggressions at the school and in general. The interview participants also participated in the six professional development training sessions.

General Findings & Data Analysis

A mixed methods action research methodology was used for this study. In mixed methods studies qualitative and quantitative methods are combined to allow the researcher to use multiple techniques when gathering data (Efron & Ravid, 2020). For this study the researcher used focus group interviews, pre- and post-surveys, observation field notes, and participant field notes. The analysis of the data was mostly completed after the focus group interviews and professional development training sessions were completed.

Focus Group Interviews

During the first phase of the research study, three faculty members from the school participated in the focus group interviews. This group of three consisted of two females and one male. Of the three participants in the focus group interviews, one participant was White, and two participants were Black. The male participant was new to the teaching field and had less than three years teaching experience. One of the females had eight years of experience in the school, however, only four as a teacher. The other female participant had three years of experience in the school and did not work as a teacher in the classroom.

There were two interviews; the participants were asked three questions during the first interview and two questions during the second interview. Below are the questions asked by the researcher and the participants' responses. The researcher took notes throughout the interviews as a couple of the participants were uncomfortable with audio recording. The names for the purpose of reporting the findings of the interviews were J, N, and Z. These initials were selected for the purpose of confidentiality.

The details for the first interview are provided below.

Interview 1:

Have you witnessed or been the target of a microaggression here at school? If so, would you share what was said to you?

Participant Z mentioned that he was the target of the following microaggressions:

- He was called Malcolm as a joke, though his name was not Malcolm.
- Was told that he probably understood because it was "Someone like you."

- Other people made subtle jokes about his age.
- Students put in his class because he would be able to build a relationship because they are both Black.
- Some teachers would not even acknowledge him in the hallways, however, would say hello to a White coworker next to him.

Participant Z mentioned witnessing the following microaggressions:

- A teacher mentioned to him that they cannot tell if the student is a he or she and students should not be able to decide their sex.
- He overheard a teacher use the term “Colored people.”
- He overheard many students call other students gay.

Participant J mentioned that she was the target of the following microaggressions:

- Participant J had many people assume she was Hispanic because of her last name.
- She was the recipient of a few comments from a male coworker saying she was not feminine enough.

Participant J mentioned witnessing the following microaggressions:

- Participant J has heard multiple students call each other gay.
- She watched a teacher play hangman on the board in a classroom. The school had discussed the negative implications of this game and how some individuals have connected this game to historical racist acts.
- She witnessed many negative comments about the older teachers.

- She witnessed a couple of teachers referring to the black students in their class as “those kids” every time they spoke about them.
- She witnessed teachers repeatedly mispronounce a student’s name and then laugh it off.

Participant N mentioned that she was the target of the following microaggressions:

- She was called a colored person.
- She mentioned people not even making eye contact with her in the hallways.
- She mentioned being called an angry Black lady.
- She has been complimented on how well and clearly, she spoke.
- She has been told; well, you understand because you are Black.

Participant N mentioned witnessing the following microaggressions:

- She overheard someone say that the angry Black person probably had a gun.
- She has overheard a teacher say that they do not see color.
- She has overheard a teacher say they cannot be racist because they have a black friend.
- She has overheard many students call each other gay.

Was the perpetrator a student or faculty member?

Participant Z responded that the majority of the microaggressions were from faculty members. The microaggressions that came from students were done

mostly in a joking matter, although some of the student-to-student microaggressions escalated into physical altercations.

Participant J responded that the perpetrator was most often a faculty member. She added that most of the student-to-student microaggressions were centered around a student calling someone gay or making an offensive comment about someone's sexuality.

Participant N responded that all the microaggressions that she was a target of were from other faculty in the building and mostly about race. When witnessing some microaggressions from student-to-student, N responded that the microaggressions were mainly regarding race or sexuality.

Can you describe the feelings you had after the microaggression was stated to you?

Participant Z responded that he felt confused. He discussed how he found himself trying to figure out if the person even knew that what they were saying was harmful. He stated, "Sometimes I wonder if the person is actually being mean, or are they clueless, or are they ignorant." He seemed to struggle with understanding the mindset the perpetrator was coming from.

Participant J discussed how the comments left her frustrated and discouraged. She shared that she wished both the faculty and students that were stating the microaggressions would have more empathy and take time to learn more. She stated that "With this day and age, I thought people would be less sexist." She seemed frustrated that some people were making comments that she thought were outdated.

Participant N described feeling tired of having to constantly defend herself. She also described a feeling of exhaustion when constantly having to be the one to say something or nothing would be said at all. At this point a discussion about racial battle fatigue occurred. Participant N stated, "I am just tired of being the only one to say something or to stand up to someone, nothing is changing, and then I look like the mean one or the bad one." Participant N also described feeling curious as to whether the perpetrator was stating the microaggression to try to start a fight or a heated discussion on purpose.

As a reminder, Interview 2 occurred one week after Interview 1.

Interview 2

Now that we have discussed the themes and patterns from your responses from the first interview, what are some things you think attributed to these microaggressions?

During this interview, the discussion happened fluidly as Participants Z, J, and N all discussed more as a group rather than taking turns like in the first interview. The comments that derived from the group discussion came together in two overarching thoughts on this question. The participants all agreed, and their thoughts are outlined below.

The first thought as to what attributed to the microaggressions discussed in the first interview was that there may be an extreme lack of understanding as to what microaggressions are. Participants Z, J, and N felt that many of the microaggressions may have been stated completely unknowingly of the harm they were causing. There were no excuses made for the microaggressions;

however, the participants of the interview simply wondered if the faculty committing the microaggressions were even aware. Participant Z shared, “This one teacher called her Black students, colored, I think she said it because she does not know any better, because she does not have a mean bone in her body”. Participant J added to that comment by saying, “I agree, it is not an excuse for it; however, it is a reason why she said it.”

The second thought was that nothing has been previously done about microaggressions at the school. They have become so prevalent that maybe people are afraid to address them or even discuss them as they have been commonplace for so long. Two participants added that they would not even know where to start in trying to address this issue. One participant stated, “It is hard to know who to report the microaggressions to as nothing has been done for so long -- I do not even know who to go to.” Another participant added, “Reporting it would only put a target on my back, they have heard the same comment I heard, and they did nothing about it when they first heard it, why would they act now.”

Since our last interview, have you thought of any other microaggressions that you have been the target of or is there anything else you would like to add?

The responses to this interview question were short and there was not a lot of deep discussion on the matter. Participant N was the only one who individually added anything new and wanted to add that she noticed some teachers mixing up the names of some of the Black students on a regular basis. She shared that sometimes she finds herself wondering if a comment said to her

was indeed a microaggression or not. The interview ended with a brief discussion on how some teachers have mentioned that they have done certain things or said certain things for years and that they are too old to change.

Themes Emerging from Interviews

Inductive analysis was used to review the focus group interview results. Through this analysis a total of five themes were identified by the researcher. These 5 themes were evident in the first and the second interview cycle.

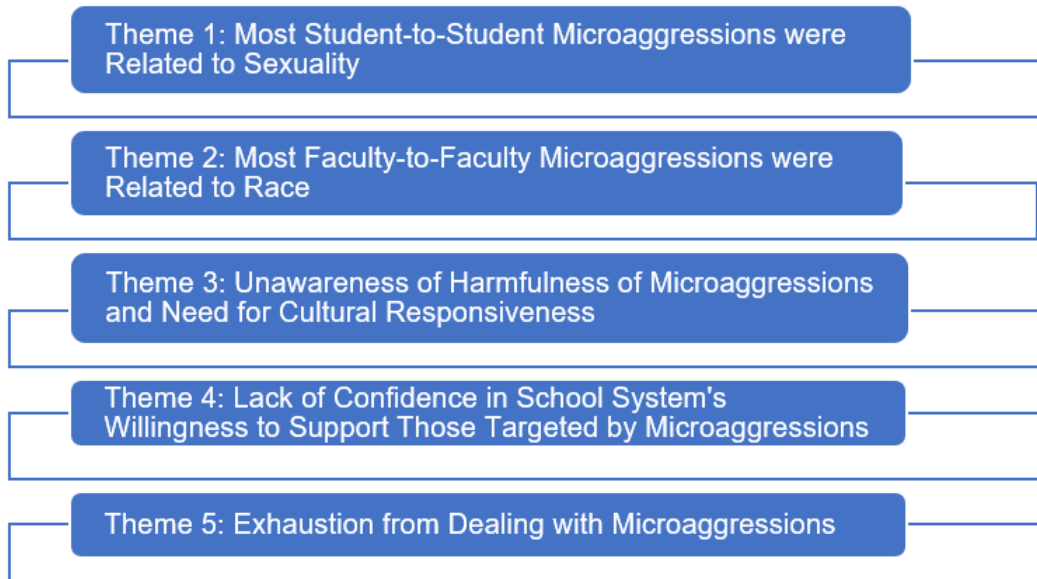


Figure 4.1 Observed Themes Related to Microaggressions

Theme 1: Most Student-to-Student Microaggressions were Related to Sexuality

The study participants noticed that although some microaggressions from students towards other students were racially based, most of the student-to-student microaggressions were centered around sexuality, with the most frequent one of making comments about a student being gay. Participant J mentioned

during interview 1 that she overheard a student ask another male student how his boyfriend was because of how he was dressed. Participant Z added to this that any time a certain male student came near him he would loudly say to the student, “I knew you liked boys, you are so gay.”

Theme 2: Most Faculty-to-Faculty Microaggressions were Related to Race

The participants also noticed that most of the faculty-to-faculty microaggressions were racial microaggressions. This was evident in some of the microaggression examples given such as, Participant Z sharing that another staff member assumed his name was Malcolm and how another staff member assumed he was good at sports because he was black. Also, Participant N shared that she overheard a faculty member ask if another black faculty member’s hair was real. The participants had some confusion as to whether the perpetrators were even aware as to what they were saying was hurtful.

Theme 3: Unawareness of Harmfulness of Microaggressions and Need for Cultural Responsiveness

Participants expressed how they were unclear if the person using the microaggression was completely unaware of the potential harm or if they intended to cause harm. The unawareness of faculty and a need for more cultural responsiveness from faculty emerged as a theme from multiple participant comments. Participant N stated that after a faculty member referred to a Black faculty member as “colored”, she wondered if the individual even knew any better. Participant Z stated that a faculty member told him he didn’t sound

Black when he talked. After sharing this statement, Participant Z said he did not think the person knew what they were saying was mean.

Theme 4: Lack of Confidence in School System's Willingness to Support Those Targeted by Microaggressions

The fourth theme is one of doubt in the school system to support those targeted by microaggressions. All three participants agreed that they have little to no confidence that it will improve as microaggressions have already been pervasive for so long. In the discussion, all participants shared that they would not know who to even report microaggressions to as there were no policies or reporting protocols in place. Participant N added that she worried about sounding like a complainer or angry Black person if she reported anything. Another joint fear was that if the perpetrator were an administrator, retaliation could be an issue.

Theme 5: Exhaustion from Dealing with Microaggressions

The last theme was that of exhaustion. The two participants that were the targets of racial microaggressions discussed how they were tired of being the recipients, tired of feeling alone in the fight, and tired of feeling as though saying something would not matter. This is similar to racial battle fatigue where individuals are emotionally and physically drained from fighting against racism (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Quaye et al., 2020).

Pre- and Post-Survey Questions Results

This research study used professional development training for the intervention. The sessions were conducted in six different sessions lasting 45-60

minutes each. Originally, 23 participants signed up for the professional development and took the pre-survey; however, only 21 participants completed the professional development training and took the post-survey. The two participants who did not complete the professional development training had other mandatory commitments that did not allow them to continue. The pre-survey responses for the two participants that could not continue the professional development were left in the data as the survey was anonymous and it was not possible to know which responses were theirs. The responses to both the pre-survey and post-survey are listed below.

Pre- and Post-survey

Initially, faculty were given an opportunity to indicate their understanding of microaggressions. For the pre-survey, the survey was administered at the beginning of the first professional development session. Next, the intervention was implemented through the provided six professional development sessions. After the intervention was successfully completed, participants were then administered the post-survey to reevaluate the understanding of microaggressions. Table 4.1 outlines the responses for the pre- and post-survey as it relates to participants’ understanding of microaggressions.

Table 4.1 Understanding of Microaggressions

Response options	Number of responses (Pre)	Number of Responses (Post)
Extremely familiar	0	4
Very familiar	6	16
Somewhat familiar	14	1

Not so familiar	3	0
Not at all familiar	0	0

For the pre-survey, a total of 6 of 23 participants or 26% of participants noted that they were either very familiar or extremely familiar with what microaggressions were. The post-survey data notes that 20 of 21 participants or 95% of the participants noted on the post-survey that they were either extremely familiar or very familiar with what microaggressions were. This increased positive shift in familiarity in what microaggressions are shows the positive impact of the focused professional development training.

The second question in both the pre- and post-survey asked participants to rate their understanding about how microaggressions affect others. As part of the professional development training, the researcher shared how microaggressions can have harmful impacts such as psychological stress, depressions, sleeping problems, eating disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and others (Torino et al., 2019).

The data related to participants understanding of how microaggressions affect others is quite promising. Participants in the pre-survey answered “very clear” at 48% (or 11/23) and “extremely clear” at 9% (or 2/23). Participants in the post-survey answered “very clear” at 38% (or 8/21) and “extremely clear” at 62% (or 13/21). This demonstrated a 53% increase in participants being extremely clear with understanding the harmful impact microaggressions have on others.

Table 4.2 Understanding How Microaggressions Affect Others

Response options	Number of responses (Pre)	Number of responses (Post)
Extremely clear	2	13
Very clear	11	8
Somewhat clear	8	0
Not so clear	2	0
Not at all clear	0	0

In both the pre- and post-surveys participants were asked if they had been the recipients of any derogatory slights or insults. The responses are listed below. In the pre-survey there was a 52% (or 12/23) response of “yes. In the post-survey there was a 67% (or 14/21) response of “yes”.

Table 4.3 Slight or Insults Directed at Participants

Response options	Number of responses (Pre)	Number of Responses (Post)
Yes	12	14
No	11	7

In the surveys participants were asked if they experienced derogatory slights or insults directed at faculty and the frequency of the occurrences. These questions were asked identically in both the pre- and post-surveys. The question was asked to gain insights on how often faculty were the targets of derogatory slights or insults. The wording of “derogatory slights or insults” was used in the surveys as many participants were not familiar with the definition of the term microaggressions before the professional development started. The results were very similar in Table 4.4 when compared, pre-survey resulted in 61% (or 14/23) responses of “yes”, and post-survey resulted in 62% (or 13/21) responses of “yes”. This demonstrated that after learning about what microaggressions are the participant responses about faculty as targets remained similar.

Table 4.4 Slight or Insults Directed at Faculty

Response options	Number of responses (Pre)	Number of Responses (Post)
Yes	14	13
No	9	8

Table 4.5 Frequency of Slight or Insults Directed at Faculty

Response options	Number of responses (Pre)	Number of Responses (Post)
Every day	0	0
A few times a week	4	3

About once a week	2	7
A few times a month	7	4
Less than once a month	10	7

In the surveys participants were asked if they experienced derogatory slights or insults directed at students as well as the frequency of the occurrences. These questions were asked identically in both the pre- and post-surveys. These questions suggested an increase in awareness about microaggressions as participants were asked to rate the occurrence and presence of the slights or insults towards students. The pre-survey had a response of 13% (or 3/23) for occurring “a few times a week” and 30% (or 7/23) for “less than once a month”. The post-survey had a response of 33% (or 7/21) for occurring “a few times a week” and 14% (or 3/21) for “less than once a month”. The large decrease in participants responding that they noticed microaggressions in the “less than once a month” category could suggest that before the professional development trainings that microaggressions were going unnoticed.

Table 4.6 Slight or Insults Directed at Students

Response options	Number of responses (Pre)	Number of Responses (Post)
Yes	18	18
No	5	3

Table 4.7 Frequency of Slight or Insults Directed at Students

Response options	Number of responses (Pre)	Number of Responses (Post)
Every day	2	2
A few times a week	3	7
About once a week	7	7
Once a month	4	2
Less than once a month	7	3

The second to last question of the post-survey asked participants how they felt after the professional development sessions about being able to acknowledge microaggressions. Participants responded 100% “I feel more confident in my ability to acknowledge microaggressions” as seen in Table 4.8. This result served as the answer to the second research question for this action research study. The second research question was: What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on teacher awareness of microaggressions? This demonstrated complete growth in the participants progressing minimally into the conscious competence stage regarding acknowledgment of microaggressions.

Table 4.8 Post Confidence Level in Acknowledging Microaggressions

Response options	Number responses
I feel more confident in my ability to acknowledge microaggressions.	21
I feel the same confidence level in my ability to acknowledge microaggressions.	0
I feel less confident in my ability to acknowledge microaggressions.	0

This last question in the post-survey asked participants how they felt after the professional development sessions about being able to address microaggressions. The responses were 86% (or 18/21) “more confident” and 14% (or 3/21) “same confidence” as noted in Table 4.9. This result demonstrated that most participants in the professional development sessions increased their ability to address microaggressions in order to help create a culturally responsive learning community. This result served as the answer to the third and last research question for this action research study which was: What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on how teachers respond and/or address microaggressions when being the target or bystander?

Table 4.9 Post Confidence Level in Addressing Microaggressions

Response options	Number responses
I feel more confident in my ability to address microaggressions.	18
I feel the same confidence level in my ability to address microaggressions.	3
I feel less confident in my ability to address microaggressions.	0

The last two questions of the post-survey and the participant responses demonstrated growth to being more culturally responsive and this in turn will help participants in being able to create a more supportive environment for all students. Morrison et al. (2022) pointed out that learning about and using culturally informed pedagogies can help interrupt inequities in education. Teachers can increase their ability to be more culturally responsive in their teaching practices by working towards developing a culturally diverse knowledge base through focusing on different styles in learning and communication (Abacioglu et al., 2020). Learning about microaggressions and being able to acknowledge and address them helped the participants be more prepared to create a more culturally responsive learning community. Learning how to better communicate with students and faculty by diving deeper into microaggressions allowed the participants to be more aware of what they say which will help avoid creating future hurdles for fellow students and faculty.

Researcher's Field Notes

During the professional development sessions, the researcher presented the main information, explained the activities, and then took field notes as an observer during the discussions. During the professional development sessions, the researcher was able to pull out different observations that stood out. The researcher noticed that the participants seemed more comfortable talking freely in small group discussions. The researcher also noticed that the depth of discussion grew as the group spent time together and progressed through the sessions. The researcher observed participants gaining trust with each other and a vulnerability to ask and answer difficult questions. The researcher noted that there seemed to be an eagerness to learn more as many questions were asked both during the professional development sessions as well as with participants connecting with the researcher at different times during the day. Many participants in the group asked if they could do another topic after this professional development cycle was completed. The topics included implicit bias, culturally responsive classrooms, and how to deal with troubling behaviors.

Summary

This chapter outlined the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research of this mixed methods action research study. The researcher analyzed the notes from the focus group interviews and found patterns of racial microaggressions common from faculty to student, and additionally the pattern of microaggressions about sexuality from student to student. Also covered in this chapter were the results in the comparison of the pre-survey and post-survey.

This highlighted many promising results to demonstrate the success of the intervention of the professional development sessions in regard to creating a more culturally responsive learning community. The findings showed that the professional development sessions helped faculty participants increase their ability to acknowledge and address microaggressions. This in turn will help create a more culturally responsive learning community. The implications for this research study will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

Overview of Study

This action research study was conducted at an elementary school in the northeast United States and used a mixed methods approach. The school serves approximately 800 students in the lowest socio-economic level school within a fairly large school district. The diversity in the student population at the school has increased yearly; however, the teacher population has remained relatively the same over the past decade. The school outlined in their improvement plan to work on creating a welcoming and affirming environment for students. The administration team noted a few current hurdles in the school to achieving this goal, one of which was microaggressions. The presence of microaggressions targeted at students and faculty was hindering this goal. This research study examined the efficiency of an intervention which provided a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community by addressing the harmful effects of microaggressions. For the purposes of this study both qualitative and quantitative methods were used when collecting data. The professional development centered around helping faculty progress through the conscious competence model stages while learning how to acknowledge and address microaggressions

in the school community. Learning about microaggressions allowed the participants to improve their understanding about culturally relevant teaching and improve their teaching practices. Which also helped teachers provide a learning space where students could feel safe, which is one of the basic needs of humans (Maslow, 1943).

Improving teaching practices is one of the goals of action research (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Action research allows educators to be reflective, evaluative, and work collaboratively to improve specific teaching and learning problems (Ali, 2020). This research study was needed as the problem and presence of microaggressions were interfering with the teacher's ability to provide a safe and culturally responsive learning environment.

Research Questions

1. In evaluating the impact of microaggressions, what themes emerged as a result of analyzing the types of microaggressions present and the effects of the microaggressions on the targeted person?
2. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on teacher awareness of microaggressions?
3. What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on how teachers respond

and/or address microaggressions when being the target or bystander?

Summary of Findings

This mixed methods action research study used qualitative and quantitative collection methods to gather data and provide findings. In summary, the results of this research provided clear answers to the three research questions focused on throughout the study. A summary of the findings demonstrates that the intervention was successful as it relates to raising awareness of the impact and potential harmfulness of microaggressions.

Research Question 1

The first research question stated: In evaluating the impact of microaggressions, what themes emerged as a result of analyzing the types of microaggressions present and the effects of the microaggressions on the targeted person? There were 5 themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. As noted by the themes, it was evident that there were certain types of microaggressions being directed at certain individuals. The five themes were:

- Most student-to-student microaggressions were related to sexuality.
- Most faculty-to-faculty microaggressions were related to race.
- Unawareness of harmfulness of microaggressions and need for cultural responsiveness.
- Lack of confidence in school system's willingness to support those targeted by microaggressions.
- Exhaustion from dealing with microaggressions.

Microaggressions being targeted at students from other students were predominantly related to that student's sexuality. Although some of the microaggressions were racially based, sexuality seemed to be more of the area of concentration for students. This was not the case with faculty. When a faculty member was the perpetrator, most microaggressions were racially based, this was true whether the target was a student or another faculty member. The third theme of unawareness came to the surface during the interviews when the participants were discussing whether the perpetrator even knew what they were saying was harmful.

The fourth theme derived from the interviews was the lack of confidence in change from the school. The interview participants shared that microaggressions have been present for so long that the lack of confidence in the school's ability or willingness to change was quite deep. The fifth theme that surfaced was the exhaustion from the targets of having to constantly deal with the microaggressions with a feeling of despair as they felt isolated in their fight to combat microaggressions. This exhaustion is compared to racial battle fatigue.

Research Question 2

The second question asked: What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on teacher awareness of microaggressions? The professional development had a strong and positive impact as evidenced by the post-survey results. Out of the 21 participants, all 21 responded that they were more confident after participating in the professional

development sessions. That is a response of 100% of participants feeling more confident in being able to acknowledge microaggressions.

Research Question 3

As noted, the third research question asked: What impact does a six-week targeted and comprehensive professional development, focused on creating a culturally responsive learning community, have on how teachers respond and/or address microaggressions when being the target or bystander? The answer to this final research question also provided promising results. For the post-survey question relating to this research question, 86% (or 18/21) of the participants responded that they felt more confident in their ability to address microaggressions after participating in the professional development training. In answering the three research questions the data showed that microaggressions were present in the school, themes or patterns were present when analyzing the types of microaggressions, and the professional development had a strong and positive impact on teachers' awareness and ability to address microaggressions, which in turn helped teachers focus on creating a culturally responsive learning community.

Implications for Future Research

This mixed methods action research was able to build from and support current research that demonstrated the harmful presence of microaggressions in schools and the lack of awareness about what microaggressions are and how to address them. Although there have been many studies about microaggressions at the higher education level, the research is lacking at the K-12, especially

elementary, levels of education. The presence of microaggressions in schools is alarming. Research has proven that microaggressions are harmful (Compton-Lilly, 2020; Douds & Hout, 2020). Research has also shown the incredible necessity for students to feel safe and have a sense of belonging in their own school setting (Domalewska et al., 2021; Fredrick et al., 2021). Without the basic needs being met, students cannot focus on more higher order needs (Maslow, 1943). More research is needed to show how microaggressions are affecting the youngest of students in the educational system. This research study focused on the perspective of how faculty encounter microaggressions as either the target, perpetrator, or bystander. More research needs to be done looking at data from students' perspective.

Another focus for future research should be current teacher training programs or professional development series centered on culturally responsive teaching practices. Many educator preparation programs (EPPs) have made or are planning to make changes to their programs to incorporate culturally responsive practices throughout their degrees. This focus of culturally responsive practices should not be looked at as a stand alone course, however, should be embedded into all of the educator preparation courses.

While this is promising for future teachers, there is an extreme need to help the teachers that are already in the classrooms and may not have had the appropriate training while they were in college. Using culturally responsive practices improves learning outcomes for diverse students (White, 2022). More specifically, in classrooms with diverse learners, addressing microaggressions

and unintentional bias impacts student learning (Samuels et al., 2020). Taking this into consideration it falls on the responsibility of the school district to address any needs or gaps in the culturally responsive needs of the students and faculty. The culturally responsive consciousness of school leaders serves as a foundation or cornerstone of inclusivity and can have great impact (Savopoulos et al., 2022). School leaders influence many avenues of the school environment, and it is important for districts to have goals or policies in place to be culturally responsive (Aguayo et al., 2023).

The results from this study show that there were microaggressions in the school that needed to be acknowledged and addressed. The results from the interviews, pre-survey, and post-survey demonstrated that professional development was needed and was beneficial at helping teachers combat microaggressions and create a more culturally responsive learning community. Although providing teachers with the information and training is critical, policies ensuring that there are strongholds in place to support this work are also a necessity. More research is needed around what policies would best help schools provide a culturally responsive environment. The policies need to be vetted and researched to make sure students and families from all demographics are represented in their access to protection from unnecessary harm such as encountering microaggressions in school.

Action Plan

The results of this study have provided solid information and direction for improvement. With any data, it is only useful if used to improve practice. Action

research was designed with the intention to improve teacher practice (Efron & Ravid, 2020). One of the first action steps derived from this research study was to share the results with the administration team and the district equity director. This allowed the researcher to share the results as well as the concerns and discussions brought up by the participants. This is important for school and district level administration to hear as they do not have firsthand experience as to what is going on in the classrooms and hallways on a daily basis.

Once the data and all other information from the research study was presented to the school and district level administrators, the next recommendation for action was to recreate the professional development sessions and offer the training again to other faculty members. The data from this research study showed that the professional development sessions positively impacted the participants in their ability to acknowledge and address microaggressions. While this is promising, there were only 21 participants who volunteered to participate, and the school has over 100 faculty members. This training should be available again so more faculty members can participate and learn. Since the data demonstrated success then it only makes sense to provide others the same opportunity to work on creating a culturally responsive learning community.

Learning about cultural responsiveness is not a finite process or has a limited timeframe. Learning how to be more culturally responsive is a lifelong journey. Learning about microaggressions does not make someone completely culturally responsive; however, it is part of the learning process. Other topics

such as implicit bias and culturally relevant teaching are just some of the other topics that could be explored on this journey. The researcher noted the eagerness of the participants to continue learning as they asked for another professional development session. Offering multiple series of trainings addressing microaggressions specific to different groups would help faculty improve in multiple faucets. The recommendation was given to administration to create more professional development series offered in small group settings that are sustained over time where the trust can continue to be built upon. Professional development works best when teachers from the same building can collaborate, where trust is present, and the learning opportunity is sustained over time (Zepada, 2019).

Summary

The culmination of this research study positively demonstrated how the intervention of the professional development sessions and the patterns and themes that emerged from the focus group interviews came together and helped faculty members create a more culturally responsive learning community. The pre- and post-surveys added to the quantitative data as the interviews added to the qualitative data findings. This chapter also included recommendations for future research and an action plan for suggested next steps.

Action research allows the researcher to analyze and observe the problem of practice from within and generate rich insights and knowledge to help design change in practice (Ollila & Ystrom, 2020). Most teachers enter the profession to bring positive change to the world. The information gathered and analyzed from

this mixed methods action research study provided many opportunities and avenues for educational leaders and faculty to bring positive and real-world change to classrooms. Culturally responsive teaching practices help engage students in their learning (Cherfas et al., 2021). Learning how to acknowledge and address microaggressions helped teachers become more culturally responsive. This study provided faculty with professional development training to be change agents in their school and to help prevent microaggressions from occurring. Through the professional development, participants learned about harmful microaggressions that were occurring even though at times participants were unaware of the negative implications. Developing positive and caring relationships with students helps create culturally responsive classrooms (Santiago-Rosario et al., 2022) and learning how to avoid making microaggressions allows faculty to do this. Acknowledging and addressing microaggressions are the tip of the iceberg in changing school culture.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Invitation to Participate in Research Acknowledging and Addressing Microaggressions



Dear Educators,

My name is Nicole Becker. I am a graduate student in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina, working with Dr. Yasha Becton. I invite you to participate in my dissertation study to creating a more culturally responsive learning environment through acknowledging and addressing microaggressions at Longridge Elementary School.

This study will examine teachers' understanding of microaggressions and the effect they have on staff and students. You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a teacher or staff member working with students in grades Kindergarten through 5th grade. The study will be conducted in two phases. The first phase will be a focus group interview where participants will be able to discuss experiences, they have had with either being a target or bystander of microaggressions. Phase two will be a six-week professional development series. Each session will be approximately 45 minutes long. There will be a pre-survey before the first professional development session and a post-survey at the end of the sessions. The surveys will be anonymous and disseminated via google forms. With your permission I will record or transcribe the interviews. The audio recordings of the interviews will only be reviewed by the researcher and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participation is confidential. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. If you choose to participate, you may discontinue at any time. Your completion of the initial survey will be your indication of agreement to participate.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please complete the google form attached. I will reach out to confirm participation and provide details about the study and when we will begin. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

APPENDIX B

Pre- and Post-surveys

Microaggressions Pre-survey

Please answer the following questions by selecting one response.
(Survey was disseminated via Google Forms.)

1. Rate your understanding about what microaggressions are.
 - Extremely familiar
 - Very familiar
 - Somewhat familiar
 - Not so familiar
 - Not at all familiar
2. Rate your understanding about how microaggressions affect others.
 - Extremely clear
 - Very clear
 - Somewhat clear
 - Not so clear
 - Not at all clear
3. Have you heard or experienced any derogatory slights or insults directed at you?
 - Yes
 - No
4. Have you experienced any derogatory slights or insults directed at faculty?
 - Yes
 - No
5. Have you experienced any derogatory slights or insults directed at students?
 - Yes
 - No
6. Do you feel comfortable addressing any derogatory slights or insults?
 - Yes
 - No

7. How would you rate the occurrence and presence of any derogatory slights or insults in the school targeted at students?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- About once a week
- Once a month
- Less than once a month

8. How would you rate the occurrence and presence of any derogatory slights or insults in the school targeted at faculty?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- About once a week
- A few times a month
- Less than once a month

Microaggressions Post-survey

Please answer the following questions by selecting one response.
(Survey was disseminated via Google Forms.)

1. Rate your understanding about what microaggressions are.

- Extremely familiar
- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not so familiar
- Not at all familiar

2. Rate your understanding about how microaggressions affect others.

- Extremely clear
- Very clear
- Somewhat clear
- Not so clear
- Not at all clear

3. Have you heard or experienced any derogatory slights or insults directed at you?

- Yes
- No

4. Have you experienced any derogatory slights or insults directed at faculty?

- Yes
- No

5. Have you experienced any derogatory slights or insults directed at students?

- Yes
- No

6. How would you rate the occurrence and presence of any derogatory slights or insults in the school targeted at students?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- About once a week
- Once a month
- Less than once a month

7. How would you rate the occurrence and presence of any derogatory slights or insults in the school targeted at faculty?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- About once a week

- A few times a month
- Less than once a month

8. After participating in this Professional Development, how do you feel about being able to ACKNOWLEDGE microaggressions?

- I feel more confident in my ability to acknowledge microaggressions.
- I feel the same confidence level in my ability to acknowledge microaggressions.
- I feel less confident in my ability to acknowledge microaggressions.

9. After participating in this Professional Development, how do you feel about being able to ADDRESS microaggressions?

- I feel more confident in my ability to address microaggressions.
- I feel the same confidence level in my ability to address microaggressions.
- I feel less confident in my ability to address microaggressions.